

Joseph Yunis (2006 – 2008)

It's such a pleasure to be able to share with you my experiences at St James College. It's a wonderful place to be in because every time I come here at St James, I feel at home. The first time I came to the College was in September of 2006. Prior to coming to St James College, I was taken to Milperra a special school for immigrants and refugees. Milperra was used as a bridging school for mainstream high school admissions at the time. In Milperra, students were tested on their numeracy and literacy skills. Those who failed were advised to stay for a year or so while those who passed were admitted to High Schools around Brisbane especially Kedron State High School. Fortunately, because of my previous schooling in Uganda, I passed the exams and was admitted to Kedron State High School. However, I was advised by the school administration that I was round 17-18, and according to the Australian education system my high school years were over. I was advised to go to TAFE. That day, I went home regretting why I even came to Australia. I thought to myself, will I ever make it to University? How will I study physics, chemistry, maths and biology at TAFE yet I want to pursue University education?

Suddenly, a friend of our sponsor told my mum that he knew of a Catholic school in the city and would bring us the next day. On hearing the news, the next day couldn't come fast enough. I was very happy but mindful at the same time. Nevertheless, when I arrived and was welcomed by Tony McCulkin and introduced to Fiona Hales, I could not stop smiling. In fact, I was very happy throughout the enrolment process and could not wait to get to class the next day. This was when I learnt of the welcoming nature of the school.

Putting on my school uniform with a hat on in the scorching heat with a heavy bag on my back with no lunch box, I was ready for the journey. But I soon knew how valuable a lunch box was because I was starving and could not understand easy concepts. In fact, this was my first day school. I was in a boarding school for 10 years from a young age of 6. I also knew how to switch on the computer, a machine I had not seen before.

However, what I really experienced that day and during my time at St James was exceptional. In my home room, students came to me asking me questions "Hey, how are you doing?", "what is your name", "where are you from", "what grade are you in", "do you play sport"? During morning tea and lunch breaks, more of the same, but this time a far more tricky question "Which house are you in"? I later learnt the significance of what the Houses meant for students. This is because it not only brought out the rivalry between the Houses during competitions but also formed the basis of integration as seniors and juniors alike shared experiences and advice. This became an important part of building cohesion within a group. It also formed a meeting place furthering student engagement and inclusiveness. This made one belong to a small family of an even bigger St James family. As times went by, I realised I was making friends at a rate that I always describe as exponential in nature. This was something else when I was college captain as I challenged myself to know every student by name.

To succeed at St James, you need to be hard working, disciplined, determined, committed and to always believe in your ability. The school offers OP and vocational training studies which tailors students' needs to best suit them. This helps students find their interests. However, without support, encouragement and love, it's not easy to bring out the best in students. Teachers here have these ingredients. As teachers in the Edmund Rice tradition, they are ready to go that extra mile to help that one student, who needs help, or the two, three, four and the list goes on.

Throughout my high schooling at Jimmies I experienced all these. I realised that if I asked, I always was attended to, if I knocked on the door, it always was opened and if I could not seek anymore because I could not find, I was challenged not to give up but to keep searching knowledge. In life, this is real. If you don't ask, you won't know. I encourage you to keep asking questions you find intriguing and always be happy and ready to learn whilst immersing yourself in this rich multicultural school. As College Captain at the time, I was stretched even further in leadership. Although it was challenging, at the end I was honoured to lead such a dynamic school.

As a graduate of 2008, I was and still ma very grateful for the opportunity I had at St James. If you want to succeed at Jimmies you always will. As long as you have the zeal to pursue your dream you will get there.

I have just completed my third and final year at UQ studying a bachelor degree in Science and majoring in Biomedical Science with speciality in microbiology, immunology and infectious disease. I'm hoping to do honours and gain more understanding about how our immune cells contribute to disease clearance whilst appreciating the challenges to the host imposed by bacteria, viruses and even parasites. This will help me challenge for further studies. This should be exciting and nevertheless a challenging experience which I'm looking forward to.

I therefore hope you too will experience a journey of much of much a higher degree. It's not only through academics, vocational training studies but also the ethos of community involvement that the school encourages through the various programs it offers. You will interact with the community in brekkie vans, a service to the homeless that has been a tradition for a long time. You will learn compassion and find a place in your heart to address those issues in the developing world. You will experience multiculturalism and acknowledge first hand the difference and the richness it brings. Above all, you will be immersed in a rich spiritual journey that will help you understand the world around us. I wish you all the best in finding a future for your children and I hope you will call St James home in the days and years to come.