

## 2020 Magazine article

2020 will be remembered as the year in which we waged war against an invisible enemy - Covid 19 - the virus that multiplied within the living cells of humans across the globe, creating a pandemic that shook the world. This invisible virus, too small to be seen even by light microscopy, forced us to reinvent the well-established routine that used to inform thousands of happy victories experienced at our dear school over the past 145 years. And yet, despite the fact that it ripped us out of our comfort zones and hurled us into a new reality of uncertainty and anxiety, the happy victories experienced at Eunice over the past ten months attest to our ultimate victory - one which speaks of an age-old Eunice resilience and an indomitable Eunice spirit.

Miss ELM King was headmistress of Eunice from 1914 – 1926. She was a particularly talented lady and a well-known artist and poet. Unfortunately, neither singing, nor mass assemblies were the order of the day this year, but the words of this beautiful poem (that actually consists of 5 verses) reverberated in so many of the key moments documented throughout the course of the year, that the full school song (performed by Mrs M Anderson at the Matric Valedictory Service this year) could easily be seen as a visionary script for the Eunice moments – and happy victories - that we achieved during a never-to-be-forgotten year..

### Verse 1

Though all around has *changed*

since her *cornerstone* was laid

The spirit of Eunice

has never been *dismayed*.

The future will not fright her,

she fears nor change nor strife

For she dwells beside the waters

of *wisdom and of life*.

The educational arena ***changed*** within minutes after the Presidential announcement of a National Lockdown in March.

Innate drive and the re-assessment of deliverables became part of our lives. And as we grappled amidst the world-wide uncertainty of an ever-changing reality, it is the values embedded in Eunice's firmly-laid ***cornerstone*** that anchored us.

The spirit of Eunice will never be ***dismayed***. 2020 was our year of steadfastness and it provided us with the opportunity to discover the extent of our resilience and tenacity..

In order to maintain our collective goal of ensuring our learners' progress beyond the year of disruption, we established a routine of successive problem-solving and goal-driven innovation. Experience and insight, combined with intense online staff training to launch a platform for effective distance learning, informed our newly-designed academic programme during lockdown.

#### Verse 2

And we her children love her,

alike the big and small;

Her name and fame and honour

are dear to one and all;

And love of her unites us

and makes a mighty bond,

To bind the ***past and present***

and the fateful years beyond.

A fusion of ***past and present*** successes reinforced our founding ideals.

The inspirational messages that 14 of the 2019 Academic Top Achievers and Board medallists shared with the school on 15 January 2020 were indeed words of wisdom. The messages: “Nothing worth having is ever easily achieved” and “Nothing should ever stop you from reaching your dreams” echoed through all the messages, and crystallised an indefatigable spirit of perseverance for the entire school.

I salute every lady (past and present), every School Governor, every School Management Team member, all our parents and guardians, each and every educator, all admin staff members and support staff members for uniting and collaborating to uphold our vision of excellence and commitment during 2020. Academic excellence, quality teaching, social responsibility and the creation of multiple opportunities designed to address contemporary needs, remain our primary goals.

Please allow me to single out Mr Leon van Rensburg, Mrs Mag Marais and Mrs Jackie Botma for being exceptional Deputy Principals; as well as Mrs Alit van Rensburg, for being the remarkable, trusted Senior House Mother of Eunice House. They were and are key role players in repetitive processes of protocol development and have been available at all hours of the day and night to brainstorm solutions to ever-emerging crises. They are true ambassadors of the Eunice ethos and have left no stone unturned to ensure that we offer a safe space for staff and learners, both at school and at Eunice House. Their input speaks of vision and absolute commitment to Eunice excellence during a volatile time in our school’s history. Their unwavering support – on a personal and professional level – is much appreciated.

Teamwork is a pleasure with such steadfast and unselfish leaders by my side.

### Verse 3

She bids us pull together,

she bids us *give and take*.

And selfish aims forego

when the common weal’s at stake

In playtime and in worktime,

in class and on the field,

She bids us fight the battle,

she warns us not *to yield*.

Our class secretaries deserve special recognition. They went beyond their call of duty to ensure that the bond between staff and learners remained intact during a time of immense disconnection at the start of the national lockdown.

Each and every one of Eunice's role players contributed to a process of *give and take*, and what followed was the creation of a beautiful Eunice family - one characterised by committed and selfless family members.

Each and every one of us tapped into the 145 year-old core of Eunice's character and applied the necessary self-regulation and focus to set new individual and collective goals and to establish new routines that were in the best interests of the Eunice family as a whole.

More than a hundred years after the outbreak of the Spanish flu in 1918, which swept through the entire world, much like the Covid pandemic swept through our world during this year, we followed in the footsteps of the Eunice heroines of old and motivated our whole school community to stay connected, to conquer one day at a time and never *to yield*.

The significance of our annual themes cannot be underestimated, and the theme of 2020, in particular, can certainly not be considered to be coincidental. We lived to inspire in 2020, and the accompanying logo of hands that tap into a communal life-line, reminded us that we can always rely on one another.

Our ladies shared 627 messages of hope online and staff members wrote messages of inspiration to their learners in the C-19 edition of the Quid Novi in 2020. Our Learner Support Department published online self-help seminars and sports teams published fun-filled short films recorded at their respective homes. Insight, compassion and innovation formed the basis of a tenacious, collective effort to maintain hope and vision for our bright futures.

We might not have been able to enjoy the advantage of personal interaction in our newly-established Meeting Place, Life Centre or Reading lounge for the majority of the year, but we certainly made the most of the E(unice)-space created by dedicated educators.

E-Eunice did not yield to isolation during a time when separation was the order of the day.

Verse 4

And day by day she trains us,

*our body, mind and soul.*

In fortitude and freedom,

in pluck and self-control.

And when at last we leave her,

'twill soften our regret

To feel she will not alter,

and we shall not forget.

Eunice is so much more than just a school. She cares in ways that never cease to amaze me. I gladly share but a few of the many key moments experienced during the past 7 months.

- Our Head Girl, Kim Joubert, wrote a compelling article about her adjusted approach to a Covid Matric year. The article highlighted the value of soft skills and essential co-curricular and social development, all of which reach far beyond the curriculum.
- Staff members shared their private spaces and gave us sneak peaks of their lockdown routines, thereby promoting general wellbeing with our virtual community.
- So many of our community members joined in virtual runs and challenges, encouraging one another to stay active despite numerous limitations.
- Shared vulnerability ensured an indestructible bond between our staff and matriculants, and helped us to conquer the initial uncertainty experienced upon our return to the Adèle de Jager foyer on 1 and 8 June 2020, after the national level 5 and 4 lockdown due to the global pandemic.
- Staff triumphed despite disrupted routines, They sanitised venues continually and selflessly shuffled between teaching venues, repeating lessons up to ten times in two days to ensure that health and safety protocols were meticulously observed.
- Grade 8 – 11 learners overcame the disappointment of not necessarily attending school on the same days as their best friends and, in the process, forged new support groups, adorned in the new addition to the Eunice uniform: the beautiful, floral Eunice mask.
- Special messages in our inboxes or notes of gratitude left on our tables energised us to do more than we thought was physically possible.

- Working hours became irrelevant and staff and support staff worked overtime without being asked to do so - relentlessly and repeatedly ensuring safe working spaces for all.
- Colleagues unexpectedly entered my office to create a powerful circle of prayer around me in a time of great uncertainty.
- A matriculant unexpectedly ran into my office and poured her heart out in ardent appreciation of Eunice's impact on her life.

Life at Eunice is a blessed one and one of all-round development. It addresses the needs of ***body, mind and soul*** and is characterised by the making of memories for a lifetime.

Verse 5

For with her honour trusted

***her children will go forth,***

To meet life's grand adventure

East, West and South and North.

And with the torch she gave them

they ***light the darkest way***

While the love that knits them to her

grows deeper day by day.

We bid our special matric class of 2020 farewell on 22 October 2020. The journey of these daughters of Eunice came full circle at their Awards Ceremony and Valedictory Service, celebrated around the fountain of ***wisdom and of life***, where they had shared their dreams for their futures as prospective Grade 8s of 2016 on 21 November 2015.

Susan C. Young said: "As a pearl is formed and its layers grow, a rich iridescence begins to glow. The oyster has taken what was at first an intrusion and uses it to enrich its value. She

went further and asked a pertinent question: “How can you coat or frame the changes in your life to harvest beauty, brilliance, and wisdom?”

Our matrices contributed greatly to our rich history during this year. They matured into the truest bridgebuilders, mentors and ambassadors of hope that Eunice has ever had. It is for this reason that we gifted each of them with a pearl pendant, in the hope that that they would frame and celebrate their own experiences as Eunice ladies.

They, unknowingly, forged a unity amongst our ladies during the 2020 Inter-High Gala - one which cultivated a school spirit that proved to be pivotal in our quest to conquer the obstacles we had to face during a global pandemic.

Together they conquered a complete new way of life at school. Their focus inspired the rest of the school to follow in their footsteps and to focus on protecting one another’s wellbeing. Their tenacity and example in the face of the war against Covid, mirrored the fighting spirit of your Eunice ancestors during the First World War, which broke out in 1914.

Together, we *lit the darkest* way, adapted to unforeseen changes and overcame unimaginable obstacles.

Eunice, Eunice,

no other school so dear

Oh may she *grow and prosper*

from year to changing year.

Let us celebrate our communal harvest and allow it to carry us into the future with resilience and faith. Let us choose to be custodians of hope and proud South Africans, who strive to bring communities together - in the best of times, and in the worst of times.

A *phenomenal school* - founded in 1875 – has stayed true to her name, to her founding ideals and to her motto. She celebrates a happy victory, because she succeeded in conquering herself. She empowered us to do what we do so that “ our daughters may be like cornerstones, polished after the similitude of a palace”.

May we always cherish the lessons learnt and the goals achieved in 2020.