

Girton150 Reception 12th April 2019, Pollen Bistro, Singapore

Welcome by Karen Fawcett



Welcome to the 150th celebration of Girton in Singapore. I am so proud to part of the Girton community with you all in this amazing location tonight.

I have been working with Girton on the Great Campaign board for the past few years and had many occasions to spend time back in college.

Every time I enter the drive and view the tower and my first room which was just to the right of the tower on the middle floor – room E1... I get that sense of tingling excitement and the memories come flooding back. As we enjoy the next two days, I ask you to reflect on your memories – take yourself back that to that incredible and so precious “infidel place” .

Girton really is one of my homes - and an institution which changed my life. It lifted my ambitions, gave me confidence and the safety to explore intellectually. It gave me new international friends for life who brought me to their homes in Norway and Pakistan and then to live in Singapore where I have been for the past 30 years and enjoyed a really exciting career.

Girton has always done an outstanding job of being the glue around the world - attracting and supporting international students from the very beginning - many from Asia, and many as we know who are very famous and integral to our society now.

Now interestingly, 37 years ago, Girton did not do much to fill my musical needs - -it took a lot of cycling up and down that hill to achieve that – but that has changed and I am so thrilled we have the Choir along with Jeremy West this weekend exhibiting the amazing talent & skills Girton is now rightfully proud of. A few weeks ago after Formal Hall (do you remember that? the food is still delicious!) , I was taken to “compline” a new service held at 9pm in the college chapel. It was an incredibly beautiful experience – candles and gentle music. The joy of great music is how it can break down barriers - - you could appreciate or ignore the religion because the overall experience is so beautiful.

The collegiate concept providing a home and intellectual and artistic anchor is a special and something I believe we need to support and protect. The concept is catching on ... here in Singapore we have seen NUS adopting the same concept.

But, the fact is that the bespoke residential higher education that a college like Girton offers is really expensive to deliver and the ambition of the College for its students needs our ongoing support.

Some of our friends here have been incredibly generous in supporting this weekend to get us all together and now I would urge you all to dig deep and think hard about how we can help more Singaporeans to experience what we did in Girton. Many of us here are well on the way to creating a suite of new scholarships for students from the Asia Pacific region. The Mistress will tell us more about these tomorrow.

I have just committed to join a group of Singaporeans to do our bit towards this, by creating an endowment fund to support a graduate scholarship linked to this country. The gifts and pledges in place so far cover 2/3 of the costs.

Can you imagine how proud we will all feel to guarantee support for a young Singaporean in Girton every year. If you would like to add to this collective gift, Please talk to me, or to Deborah or the Mistress – with your generosity, I have a feeling we will have a scholarship funded by the end of this weekend!

Just a little prod... HK are on the way to having two scholarships and I do not believe we should be beaten!

Please enjoy this evening and the whole weekend - we are all so lucky to have experienced Girton – now let's enjoy bringing that experience back to life. Thank you.

