

MATT GIFFEN'S DEDICATION ADDRESS: JAMES A. GIFFEN MEMORIAL FIELD

South is an incredible school. The fact is South has always been an overachiever – it has always punched above its weight. We were never the biggest school, never had the best facilities but we always excelled. We had excellent academics, clubs, extra curricular activities, band, drama, and great sports teams. We always had the best school spirit, this innate feeling that we were part of something special. We knew we were really lucky to be in a place that was so full of life and learning. Today is a great example.

One of the only things in our lives that we cannot control is where we come from. Where we are born – where we are raised. I think all the students of South – past present and future all will agree – we lucked out. We come from a great community and a great city. I thank my lucky stars for that luck at such an early stage in my life.

Firstly, I would like to welcome some members of my family in the stands. My mother Clarice and stepfather Marsh Morris from Toronto. My sister Adrienne and her partner Bob in from Vancouver as well as my brother Frank and his partner Dana in from London, England.

I would now like to thank some key people that were instrumental in the completion of the new floor and field project.

I would like to thank Pete Telford for his ongoing support of the South Alumni program. He was a long time teacher and coach at South and continues to make an incredible contribution with the Alumni program at South. His leadership in the 75th anniversary celebrations and the Roar for the Floor fundraising program has been inspirational and further proof of the magnet that draws students and teachers back to South.

I would also like to thank Barb Sonier, the principal of South and Scott Bamford, the athletic director for over 2 years of work to make this project a reality. They were an absolute pleasure to work with.

Barb and Scott's dedication to their students well being and success is second to none. During the entire project, I witnessed their passion for their kids first hand and I am humbled by the experience. They are a credit to their profession - a profession that is amongst the most important in our society. I owe them both an immense debt of gratitude as this project would not have happened without them.

I would also like to thank Charlie Attard and his team for doing such a great job on the construction of the floor and field. They are first rate.

I also like to thank the neighbours of South for putting up with a dustbowl during construction. I'm told it was a mini- Desert Storm.

Lastly, I would like to thank the principal, teachers, parents and students of Tecumseh for their patience in any inconvenience caused. I hope they too can enjoy the field for many years to come.

As you can see, we have a little work to do yet on the field to finish it. The track isn't quite finished, but with a little luck and working together as a community we will do our best to get it done as soon as possible.

I guess I should tell you a bit about the guy whose name is plastered on that sign over there. James Giffen is my dad. James Albert Giffen, or Big Jim, as he was known to friends and family, was born on December 11 1931. He grew up in the house at the top of the hill on the corner of Upper Queens and Commissioners. He attended Mountsfield Public School and then high school here at South. He played football on this field over 60 years ago for Coach Ernie McTavish. Despite losing both of his parents early in life, Big Jim graduated from Western, got married to the love of his life, Clarice Watson and went to law school at Osgoode Hall in Toronto. Big Jim was never much of a student in high school or undergrad but he was top of his class at Osgoode. He loved the law and excelled at it. My mom and dad moved back to London to raise a family and start his law practice. He was to practice law in London for the rest of his life becoming a Queens Counsel (QC). He died on the 27th of October 1990 as he and my Mom were driving to Florida to pick out their retirement home.

I have a lot of great memories of my Dad. Some of my happiest memories came at this field.

I started playing football in grade 9 – I was vertically challenged and weighed all of a buck 10. I was 5th string quarterback. In my first practice scrimmage against Montcalm I threw my first pass and it was intercepted for a touchdown. That night my Dad said, “Matt... I think you have a few issues.... Would you like me to practice with you a little bit?”

We practiced together. My Dad must have caught thousands of passes as I tried to become a better player – many here on this field. Big Jim never pushed me – it was all about working hard, sharing something and having fun together. He provided me with loads of opportunity to succeed but never put on any pressure.

Fortunately I got a little better and eventually got to play in grade 10. My Mom and Dad missed one game in 5 years – he would insist on hosting team dinners before games, team breakfasts before the big games and he smuggled champagne into the locker room after we won the Championship. Some of my most vivid memories are of my Dad as he walked up and down this field. He was a legend.

Jim Giffen was a great husband, father and friend. He was an excellent lawyer respected by all his peers. You can tell the character of a man in many ways. When my Dad died we had the viewing at a local funeral home in London. The queue went out the door and around the block. It took over an hour for people to get in. What struck me was the diversity of the people in the line. There were people from all walks of life and segments of society. He would feel equally comfortable sipping tea with the Queen as he would have a coffee with a homeless man. He was a down to earth guy who touched many people's lives.

As you could guess from his nickname of Big Jim, he was big in stature and personality but was never a big talker – he was just a guy that led by example. He always provided great advice, lots of laughs and guidance. You couldn't ask for a better father.

When I heard about the Roar for the Floor initiative, it struck an immediate cord with me. My wife Erin and I had been looking to make a charitable donation in my Dad's name for quite some time. We wanted something that would symbolize my Dad and his love of family and community.

The field was perfect.

My Dad cherished the community where he raised his family - London South. My Dad was always one to say that it was important to reach for the sky but always remember your roots.

I hope this field continues to help the students of South reach for the sky.

I hope this field continues to have great coaches willing to give their time to shape young lives and help kids become better players and better people. Win or lose it is the lessons learned that count the most.

Lastly, I hope this field continues to create special memories. Cherished memories that will last a lifetime.

Thank you.

(Editor's Note: Matt, who is the Managing Director, Head of Structured Products for the Asia Division of Scotia Capital, travelled from Singapore with his, Erin, to participate in the dedication of the field at South's Homecoming on Sat. Oct. 13/07.)