

Ladies & Gentlemen.

I am very happy that this, my 11<sup>th</sup> & final Conference is here at Cheltenham.

My first back in 2005 was also here & is firmly lodged in my memory for 3 particular reasons.

Firstly for waking up on the morning to 2 feet of snow.

Secondly to discover that my right hand helper had been taken ill in the night & had departed.

And thirdly to be given the news that my Guest Speaker, Peter Scudamore, having mixed up his dates, was in fact on the other side of the Irish Sea.

I leant very heavily on Rudyard Kipling that morning!

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That said, today will be equally memorable but for very different reasons.

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I really can't believe that it has been over 10 years since I took on this role.

It was back in January 2005, following a long run of short lived Chief Executives when I offered to come into the Office to help out Mary Anderson who was Chairman at that time.

It was going to be for 3 months.

But 3 became 6

And 6 became 12

And now 10 years later I am finally making my escape.

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Having been involved with The Pony Club in various ways since the age of 13, on both the Poacher & Gamekeeper sides of the fence, I should have known as you all know, that once you volunteer to do anything for this organisation, it is never going to be a short term commitment.

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I was considering a few statistics recently & I discovered that during these past 10 years, I have; Attended approximately 1,400 meetings,

Read & digested as many sets of minutes,

Raised a little over £1.6 million pounds in sponsorship

And eaten somewhere in the region of 600 Pickle Kopanski lunches.

But most important of all & totally immeasurable are the friends I have made & the support I have been given over this time.

From Branch Officials across the country, Council Members & Trustees past & present & last but in no way least, by my most loyal Office team, many of whom have been with me from day one.

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The Pony Club is without doubt a 'Life Changing Organisation' & these are in no way empty words.

Indeed as past speakers at our Conferences, we have had;

Olympic Medal Winners, Champion Jockeys, Kings Troop Commanders, Science Professors, Grand National Winning Trainers, [ no one who was at the Aintree Conference will forget Ginger McCain after I failed miserably to confiscate his red wine at lunch!] Indeed I believe our Royal Patron almost missed her next engagement as she couldn't tear herself away!

In addition we have had all manner of inspirational speakers, all of whom have owed & accredited much of their success & achievements to their Pony Club Education & Training.

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Not all of our Members will reach the dizzy heights of Olympic Success or Winners Enclosures, but our determination:

To promote the highest ideals of sportsmanship, citizenship & loyalty to create strength of character & self discipline, I believe is even more important today than it was 86 years ago.

If I may refer again to my lifelong but long since silent mentor, Kipling, we really do enable our wards to Talk with Crowds & Walk with Kings. And where our 4 legged friends are involved, most certainly, to meet with Triumph & Disaster.

We are all custodians of this very special ethos & I feel enormously proud & privileged to have been able to serve for this length of time.

Times are changing & the demands on you all, the backbone of the organisation are becoming more & more onerous & we must be & indeed are committed to doing everything we can to make your lives easier, because without you, the most amazing volunteer army, The Pony Club would not survive.

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And although we must embrace some change, we must also keep alive, the fact that The Pony Club has been doing what it does so very well now for 86 years & not too many organisations can boast that.

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So when I finally put the cap on my pen, pack my bags & say a fond farewell at the end of the month, it will be with the firm knowledge that thanks to you all, The Pony Club is in great heart & with your continued help & commitment, will continue so for many years to come.

Thank you.