

Vice-Chancellor, I have the honour to present, for the award of the degree of Doctor of Education, honoris causa, Victor John Ritchie.

“VOLENTI NIHIL DIFFICILE” - to those who are willing, nothing is difficult.

This is the motto of Harold Cressy High School, but it could equally be the motto of Victor Ritchie, who was principal of the school for 27 years. The life of Victor Ritchie and the life of Harold Cressy school are so intertwined and interconnected that it is really only possible to tell the story of the one through the story of the other.

Harold Cressy High School started off in three prefab rooms behind a training college in District Six (Ritchie, 2009). The conditions were crude, to say the least. But, now it's almost the stuff of legend how these crude conditions were never used as excuses by teachers or students. Instead, with VOLENTI NIHIL DIFFICILE as the motto, the school became outstanding in every sense of the word. The emphasis was on quality, on integrity and on a culture of learning. It became one of the top feeder schools to UCT, it produced alumni such as Trevor Manuel and other notable leaders, and it insisted at every turn that the students should receive the very best education that was available (Soudien, 2010).

In 1966, District Six was declared a white area under the Group Areas Act and the bulldozers moved in. By 1982, more than 60 000 people had been relocated to the sandy Cape Flats. All this time, Harold Cressy school was also a target and was under enormous pressure to move (District Six Museum, 2010). Under the leadership of Victor Ritchie, the teachers, parents and students of the school resisted. They were determined to defend their right to remain in the city, their right to be full citizens of the city and their right to a first class education (Soudien, 2006). Harold Cressy school never moved. In the wasteland of the once vibrant District Six, Harold Cressy School still stands today.

A further challenge was the student uprisings of 1976 and 1980. By 1985, the demands had changed: no longer just improved education but now: full democracy (Ritchie, 2009). The entire school participated. There was no formal teaching for four months. When seven teachers were suspended without pay, the rest pooled their salaries and all left the premises with the same pay.

Although the story of Harold Cressy High School and its principal are intertwined, there are many special stories about Victor Ritchie that are not just the stories of the school.

At the height of the school's popularity, one had to apply a whole year in advance and, when the applications opened, parents had to stand in the queue from the night before. Of course Victor Ritchie insisted that his wife stand in the queue for their own children to apply (Soudien, 2010).

He is described as a “giant of a leader”, known for his absolute fairness; his obsession with excellence and his conviction that every child can be helped to realize his or her full potential. (Adriaan, 2010). His leadership style is so based on empowerment; so bound up with the team and the community; so deflecting of the glory; that it's hard to pin the credit on Victor Ritchie. Nonetheless, he **was** awarded the order of the Disa by the Western Cape premier in 2004, along with FW de Klerk, Taliep Petersen and Allan Boesak.

Victor John Ritchie had no illusions about what was required to build a school of excellence in the face of a government that was determined to crush his ideals. In fact, it was Victor Ritchie and his team of teachers who knew what was ahead — obstacles and obstructions. So they chose their own motto to reflect their creed:

“VOLENTI NIHIL DIFFICILE” - to those who are willing, nothing is difficult.

Vice-Chancellor, I have the honour to invite you to admit to the degree of Doctor of Education, honoris causa, Victor John Ritchie.

References

- Adriaan, L., 2010. Personal Communication, 18 May 2010.
District Six Museum, 2010. <http://www.districtsix.co.za/frames.htm>, Accessed 24 May 2010.
Ritchie, V.T., 2009. Harold Cressy High School - Proposed New School Hall Funding Proposal Document.
Soudien, C., 2006. The city, citizenship and education. *Journal of Education* 40.
Soudien, C., 2010. Personal Communication, 20 May 2010.