

A High Achiever

by Mick Le Moignan (2004)

Sir Douglas Myers (1958), like his beloved All Blacks Rugby team, usually succeeds in whatever he attempts. A natural goal scorer, he uses his advantages wisely and then "locks in the gains".

He is a man of great vision and outstanding generosity. The first Caian in modern times to give £1 million to the College, this year he also became the first to raise his total gifts during his lifetime to £2,500,000. He is the first member of the Edmund Gonville Guild to have his portrait hung on the grand stairway to the College Library, next to that of his one-time tutor and lifetime friend, Neil McKendrick (1958), who retired as Master in 2005.

Interviewed by Michael Bassett for the family history, *The Myers*, Neil summed up Douglas with typical acuity: 'he was never starry academically, because he was doing other things – swimming and sport. That was entirely respectable at the time... He knew academia wasn't his bag. I've watched so many impressive scholars, double Firsts, who have gone nowhere after college. I've learnt over time that ambition is more important than ability; stamina is more important than raw intelligence; and charm is more important than anything. It was obvious that Douglas had charm, but over his career he's also shown that he had ambition and stamina.'

Douglas calls that: 'the best advice I've ever been given!' He agrees that he's not an academic, but has great admiration for them – for the former Master in particular: 'Neil has a big heart and a big spirit, that's why I like him. He has the ability to motivate people.

I took him to an All Blacks game once. He sat with some builders from the Midlands and had them totally captivated. He's a well-rounded guy, he knows what life's about. If all the Myers Scholars ended up like Neil, I'd be very happy.'

Every year since 2001, Douglas has paid for one outstanding student from New Zealand to come to Caius. The rule has always been "no lawyers and no medics" because Douglas felt there were enough of them already, but he says: 'they do cheat a bit: one did biology and went on to do breast cancer research, but I don't mind that.'

When the Myers Scholarship scheme started, some at Caius were doubtful about guaranteeing places. 'In the early days, they were afraid we'd promote people we liked who were useless!' laughs Douglas. In fact, competition for the sole spot is fierce and the winner is invariably one of the top students in New Zealand.

Academic prowess is not the only consideration. Douglas and the selection panel are looking for candidates with a measure of worldliness: 'We choose them on the basis of scholarship and character. We want people who are going to make an impact.' Having had their lives transformed by the accolade, the Scholars tend to keep in touch with the man who made it possible: 'It's like having fifteen extra children!' says Douglas, with some pride and delight.

The Myers Scholars, like their benefactor, are high achievers: eight of the twelve to graduate so far have achieved Firsts (two of them starred) and many have enjoyed sporting success as well. Sonia Bracegirdle

(2004) was the only student ever to come top in both Part II and Part III of the Chemistry Tripos, rowed for Cambridge and captained the Oxford boat as a postgraduate. She is now a business consultant with McKinsey. Alex Ross (2008) is a highly regarded research student in Economics and won a Blue for Rowing and two Half-Blues for Water Polo.

Douglas, himself a Swimming Blue, is slightly disappointed that none of the Myers Scholars has yet moved back to New Zealand, but philosophical about it: 'They've had access to the world's best education: at least, they'll be in positions of influence around the world; at best, some of them will eventually go back. New Zealand's biggest problem is isolation: it's good for the country to have friends around the world.'

Douglas is part of a family tradition at Caius: his aunt's father, Charles Myers (1891) pioneered Psychology at Cambridge and developed treatments for Shell Shock in the Great War (*Once a Caian...* Issue 14) and his own father, Sir Kenneth Myers (1925) came up before a business career in New Zealand. Douglas attended a British-style public school where they sang *God Save the Queen*. The Cambridge-educated Headmaster cleverly introduced him to a famous All Black who had also come to Cambridge, ten years earlier, who completely sold him on the idea.

Douglas found it 'upsetting to leave New Zealand and hard to settle back in again afterwards.' He travelled extensively in Europe and America, unconsciously laying the foundations of the international awareness that became his greatest strength when he eventually went home. He had a love-hate

relationship with his own country, depressed by its small-minded insularity while exulting in the freedom it gave him, especially at his farm at Matauri Bay, still his favourite place, where the living is easy and the fishing and diving are great.

He has always admired traditional British values, like democracy, the rule of law and private property, and took Britain's infatuation with the Common Market quite personally. Now, he says, 'I'm very glad they did dump us!' because it helped New Zealand to find its own identity.

His great-grandfather and great-great uncle "came out with the gold rush, until they realised there was more money in beer" and the family business they started in hotels and wines and spirits was still going, if a little moribund, when he went home. 'In 1965, it was as if time had stood still! I realised we had to get out or get bigger, so I sold the pubs and took control of the brewery.'

A series of audacious share transfers and takeovers eventually allowed Douglas to carry out an unprecedented expansion into Australia and China, to acquire Alan Bond's breweries and then sell the whole, merged Lion Nathan business to Kirin and walk away with almost half a billion dollars.

His vision and support contributed to New Zealand's victories in the first Rugby World Cup in 1987 and two victories in the Americas Cup. He worked hard, eventually as Chairman of the NZ Business Roundtable, to strengthen the nation's economy, even cooperating with an unusually far-sighted Labour Government in the late 80s, not perhaps his natural allies.

Douglas has enjoyed the fruits and freedom of his fortune and has quietly done his best to make the world a better place, notably through education. Curiously, his main motivation was not to amass a huge amount of money, but to succeed in a highly competitive environment – and prove that both he and New Zealand could compete with any on the world stage. These days, he has some serious health challenges, which he faces with characteristic fortitude, as well as interests in a global music publishing company and a pharmaceutical drug testing business, where he is confident he will make a second fortune.

He is passionately interested in what the young will make of the world, not just his own children, Jessica, Laura and Campbell Myers (2002), but generations to come. He has never been a teacher but he has clearly acquired a formidable store of practical wisdom that he would love to pass on. There is, he believes, no substitute for learning: 'If you've got a good education, you can take advantage of the opportunities that come your way.'

Douglas is proud of his association with Caius – and the College can be very proud of him.



(Clockwise from far left) Sir Douglas Myers (1958), who says his Golden Rule (after the age of 60) is 'Look at and think about others exclusively!'; The young head of New Zealand Wines and Spirits, 1979; Douglas with his son, Campbell Myers (2002) at his graduation; Douglas with the catch of the day, mid-1960s; a telling cartoon by Garrick Tremain; Douglas with the outstanding Myers Scholar, Sonia Bracegirdle (2004).

