

BRISBANE GIRLS GRAMMAR SCHOOL SPEECH DAY

FRIDAY, 14 NOVEMBER 2005, BRISBANE CITY HALL

Principal of Brisbane Girls Grammar School Ms Amanda Bell, Chairman of the Board of Trustees, Dr Cherrell Hirst AO, Members of the Board, Director-General of Education and the Arts, Mr Ken Smith, Parents and Supporters of BGGGS, students, and especially the young women in Grade 12 who are wearing the royal blue and white for the last time: what a great honour for me to be speaking with you today, unquestionably a special one for you BGGGS Seniors.

Outside on this delightful late spring afternoon, the purple Jacaranda patches are fading, replaced by the showy Christmas-red Poincianas. Inside this elegant climate-controlled art deco auditorium, the colours may be royal blue and white but the atmosphere is as celebratory as the purple and red treescape outside. Your emotions are mixed: justifiable pride and excitement at your achievements but with more than a dash of apprehension at the thought of leaving the protected BGGGS environment for the freedom and challenges of the wider world. Savour your special moment.

It is also a special moment for me. Thirty-four years ago I was sitting where you are, wondering when the speeches would finish, vaguely considering what the future might hold and silently contemplating a risk benefit analysis as to whether I should throw my hat in the fountain outside. It is safe to tell that story because today the King George Square fountains are empty, victims of water restrictions. I did not imagine that in 34 years I would be back at Brisbane City Hall as a 51 year old President of the Court of Appeal, mother of four, with a daughter who graduated from BGGGS five years earlier, addressing the students at my old school on Speech Day 2005. Beware! There is every chance one of you will be having another special moment when you address the students at the 2039 BGGGS Speech Day!

As BGGGS Seniors you have become part of the life of a remarkable Queensland institution. Let me put that statement in some historical context. Queensland came into existence as a colony separate from New South Wales 146 years ago. In 1859, 70 per cent of children aged between five and 15 years had no formal schooling. There were no secondary schools. The prevailing 19th century view was that educating the masses, and especially women, beyond elementary level was not desirable. Wealthy parents sent their sons to colleges in New South Wales or home to the mother country, England. Those educated sons became society's elite.¹ Women had only recently earned the right to own property after marriage; they had no right to vote and no right to be admitted as lawyers.

Fortunately, the Member of Parliament representing Fortitude Valley, Sir Charles Lilley, and his supporters, recognized that the new colony of Queensland needed a strong educational base if its future was not to be jeopardized by a shortage of properly trained professionals to

¹ K Willey, *The First Hundred Years: The Story of Brisbane Grammar School 1868 - 1968* (MacMillan, 1968) 2.

guide its future development.² Under Lilley's stewardship, the fledging Queensland Parliament which had its inaugural sittings in 1860 enacted both the *Education Act*, which placed all primary education under one general comprehensive system controlled by the colony's Board of General Education, and the *Grammar Schools Act*, which allowed for the establishment of a grammar school in any town where at least £1,000 could be raised locally by donation or subscription. Ten per cent of subscriptions were to be used for scholarships.³ The Act was revolutionary. It was the first attempt by any Australian colonial government to provide secondary education for all who might want it. Ipswich Grammar School was the first established in 1863. Brisbane Grammar School followed in 1869. When BGS opened its doors, many saw it as a replica of the English public school system but Sir Charles Lilley had a wider vision. He apprehended that education was for everybody, not just the elite.⁴ It was this radical vision that led him to successfully push for the foundation of Brisbane Girls Grammar School to provide girls with the same educational opportunities as their brothers. He was supported by other local visionaries including the Catholic Bishop of Brisbane, Bishop Quinn.⁵ BGGGS opened 130 years ago with 50 students in premises on George Street which it quickly outgrew after six months. It then moved to Wickham Street where it remained until 1881. The school was officially co-educational with BGS, although I suspect this was more in the management than in the day to day school operation. In 1882 BGGGS separated from "Big Brother" and ever since has continuously operated independently, although sharing many common values. In 1884 BGGGS moved to its present site at Gregory Terrace when the handsome heritage-listed main building you all know today opened to 100 students.

Sir Charles Lilley served the people of Queensland not only in Parliament for 14 years but also as a Supreme Court judge, later as Chief Justice and as Trustee and Chairman of Trustees of BGS and BGGGS. He continued to press for revolutionary education reform. In 1875, the year BGGGS was founded, he was instrumental in having the Queensland Parliament pass the *State Education Act* which confirmed free secular and compulsory education in State schools for children aged from six to 12 years, a milestone piece of legislation which led the world in social justice.

I suspect that Sir Charles Lilley had a say in the adoption of the BGS and BGGGS school motto, *Nil sine Labore* - "Nothing without labour - nothing achieved without effort". The words are sourced from Horace's First Book of Satires written in 35 BC, translated literally as "Life allows nothing to mortals without great labour". The Brisbane Grammar Schools are not unique in recognizing the wisdom of that three word grab "*Nil sine Labore*". It is shared with the prestigious Victoria School in Singapore founded in 1876, the Alexander Road High School in Port Elizabeth South Africa founded in 1955, Gilgandra High School in country New South Wales founded in 1966 and the bi-lingual Collegio Williams de Cuernavaca in Mexico founded in 1976. They are three words of sound advice for life. Your hard work has already earned you a great deal, including the right to bask in your special moment this afternoon.

² J A Hancock, "Ahead of his time: Vision that became a Reality" (Speech given at "A Tribute to Sir Charles Lilley 1827 - 1897", Brisbane Grammar School, 16 August 1997).

³ *Grammar Schools Act* 1860 (Qld), s 4.

⁴ H R Cowie, "Charles Lilley and the establishment of Brisbane Grammar School and Secondary Education in Queensland" (Speech given at "A Tribute to Sir Charles Lilley 1827 - 1897", Brisbane Grammar School, 16 August 1997).

⁵ Hancock, above, n 2.

Two thousand and five has been a year of celebration for Queensland women. I mention three things in particular. First, in January we celebrated the centenary of white women suffrage. The second was last week, when we celebrated the centenary of women's entitlement to enter the legal profession. Unbelievably, until the passing of legislation in 1905, Queensland women qualified to become lawyers could not do so because they were not considered to be "persons" under the statute enabling people to become lawyers. The third of course is your graduation from BGGGS today!

You are privileged young women, with your BGGGS education, to be spring-boarding into adult life in Australia's liberal western democracy. As talented, articulate, educated, capable young people, you know you can contribute to every facet of society and that your contributions will be fully valued, appreciated and utilized. Being female is unquestionably no barrier. When the doors of Girls Grammar close behind you as students for the last time, the doors out there are all open. The holes in the glass ceiling are wide enough so that even the sky is no limit. It is your life: live it to the lees, but always ethically and with honour and compassion. Be the best you can be, aiming for excellence in every aspect: academic, professional, personal and recreational. *Nil sine Labore*: nothing without effort. Work hard, play hard, love well. BGGGS has provided you with rock firm foundations to build your own life, one in which you will be constantly educated, challenged and renewed. As you create that future, be inspired by the vision and efforts of those who have come before: of Charles Lilley who had the radical idea that girls should have access to a full secondary school education; of the suffragettes like unionist Emma Miller who had the quaint idea that women should be entitled to vote; of the foolish Western Australian, Edith Haynes, who thought that because she had met all the requirements for admission to practice, she was "a person" who could be a lawyer. Your 2005 school leaders, Lydia Elsworthy and Georgina Horsburgh have challenged you this year to "be the difference" as Girls Grammar Seniors. Your life-long challenge now is to "be the difference".

Women have come a long way since Queensland was founded in 1859 when we had only recently acquired the right to own property once we married and still had no entitlement to education, to vote, or to become lawyers. Thankfully things are very different now. But differences still need to be made:

- we live in an age of global terrorism but remember that for centuries atrocities have been committed throughout the world in the names of all religions; the overwhelming majority of Australian Muslims wish only to be valued by their fellow Australians and to fully contribute to its peaceful and prosperous democracy
- the Equity Statistics 2004 Report of the Australian Government's Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Agency records that women comprise 44 per cent of people in total employment; they are more likely than men to work part-time making up 70.5 per cent of the part-time workforce and 33.7 per cent of the full-time workforce. Men outnumber women in managerial and administrative jobs by almost 3:1; the ratio of female to male total average weekly earnings (including overtime and full-time and part-time employment) is 65.1 per cent; the ratio of female to male average weekly earnings for full-time adult employees (excluding overtime) is 84.3 per cent.⁶ These statistics do not suggest equality in the workplace is yet a reality

⁶ Australian Government Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Agency, *Equity Statistics 2004* (Commonwealth of Australia, 2004) 2.

- in the legal profession, although for decades about 50 per cent of law graduates are women and they win the bulk of the glittering prizes, women remain grossly under-represented as partners in significant law firms, at the bar and in the judiciary
- Australian men and women continue to grapple with the work/family life balance, especially when their children are small. Studies show that women spend much more time on unpaid care labour than do men and that this imbalance persists even when women have full-time paid jobs
- the 2004 Australian Institute of Criminology International Violence Against Women Survey of 6,677 women found that, in the previous 12 months, 10 per cent of women surveyed had experienced at least one episode of physical and/or sexual violence; 57 per cent of the women experienced at least one incident of physical or sexual violence over their lifetime; younger women reported higher levels of physical and sexual violence than older women.⁷ Globally, domestic violence affects between about 10 to 50 per cent of adult women⁸
- the Australian Indigenous infant mortality rate in 2000 was 14 per 1,000 infants born, nearly three times the total Australian infant mortality rate⁹
- Indigenous Australians have a life expectancy of about 20 years less than non-Indigenous Australians¹⁰
- only one-third of Indigenous children reach Year 12 at school¹¹
- in 2004 21 per cent of the Australian prison population was Indigenous although Indigenous persons comprise no more than 2.5 per cent of the Australian population. Indigenous women and young people are about 20 times more likely to be detained in custody than non-Indigenous women and young people¹²
- globally, of the 150 million children aged between six and 11 not in school, over 90 million, 60 per cent are girls.¹³

These complex issues will not be solved simply or quickly. Regrettably, in all your combined lifetimes you are not going to run out of opportunities to "be the difference" or of opportunities to achieve positively through hard work and effort. *Nil sine Labore*. Happily, as BGGGS graduates you can achieve these things and also have lives filled with laughter, joy and satisfaction. Grammar Girls can do it all and have it all!

Thank you for allowing me to share in your special moment this afternoon. I have no doubt that many of you will return to this auditorium on future BGGGS Speech Days to speak to future Seniors about how you have responded to life's challenges and by your efforts been the difference. Go for it! Just like the Jacarandas and the Poincianas, Grammar girls keep on coming back. Like the circle of life itself, they go on forever.

⁷ J Mouzos and T Makkal, *Women's Experiences of Male Violence: Findings from the Australian Component of the International Violence Against Women Survey (IVAWS)* (Australian Institute of Criminology, Research and Public Policy Series No 56, 2004) 2 - 3.

⁸ United Nations Development Fund for Women, *Progress of the World's Women 2000* (UNIFEM, 2000) 97.

⁹ Australian Medical Association, *Public Report Card 2002 - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health: No More Excuses* (AMA, 2002).

¹⁰ Above.

¹¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Australian Social Trends 2002* (ABS, Cat No 4102.0, 2002) 111.

¹² Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, *A Statistical Overview of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples in Australia* <http://www.hreoc.gov.au/social_justice/statistics> at 11 November 2005.

¹³ J Shapiro, "Girls' Education: A Top Priority for the United Nations", *The Zontian*, 2004-2006 Biennial Issue Six, October 2005, vol 86. No 3, 12.