

The Order of Australia Association National Conference 2013

National Symposium

“Australia in the 21st Century - Challenges and Opportunities”

I'm privileged as a rapporteur to give you a particular if not peculiar summary of what happened this morning.

Our former Governor General set the scene admirably for the seminar.

He articulated the basis of Australia being “The Lucky Country”, not the ironic title that Donald Horne intended in his famous book.

We are blessed with sound and sensible institutions and governance - we shouldn't lose sight of that - the media remind us of these fundamentals almost every day with the parade of individual failings illustrative of human nature.

The great mentor Tony Ayers AC once told me that there are only three questions:

- What's the matter?
- How come? and
- So what?

Michael Jeffery and his co-contributors have identified what's the matter and how come and some of the so what:

- Governance
- Education
- Family dysfunction
- Health
- Indigenous Issues
- Food security (including clean water).

He stressed the latter point and acknowledged that Australia is well placed to deal with these issues through the talent pool of our people if we can garner the necessary bipartisan will and political leadership.

Most things are easy if you as an individual don't have to do it.

Perhaps that explains why those who know best what's wrong with our nation and how to fix it are talk back radio hosts or they write editorials, drive taxis or cut hair for a living - with the possible exception of Tim!

Our generation, but I suspect not most of the people in this room, are on the brink for the first time in Australia's relatively short history, of bequeathing to their children and grandchildren, less than they inherited from their own parents. I don't mean this in only the monetary sense.

Indeed, I take that to be the underlying theme of Michael Jeffery's address.

As a boy from Queanbeyan who was born in Canberra and now lives here, how could I disagree with Robyn Archer's passionate advocacy of Canberra as our national Capital. I've tried in various ways to assist that end.

We who live here are fortunate to have Robyn as Creative Director of the Centenary. Right at this moment and throughout the weekend at Royal Canberra Golf Course, shots from there and scenes of the Canberra landscape are being beamed into homes all around the world.

As our MC Ray Martin commented, who could not be moved by Robyn's observation about our national institutions: that

“Art is not a frill on the frock of life, but the fabric with which it is woven”.

And what about the powerful vision that Tony Coote as founder of “The Mulloon Institute” is working towards

“A sustainable and profitable farming model, turning climate change into an opportunity rather than a threat”.

Tony rightly observed that “It's not what you say it's what you do in life that matters”. He's a living example of that admonition.

Dr Sam Prince, medical entrepreneur and philanthropist - we should add philosopher - after his freedom versus fairness insight.

Sam alluded to our sense of insecurity in requiring a great and powerful friend and the lingering cultural cringe. He also fingered the burgeoning regulatory impost which is inadvertently giving succour to mediocrity; his frozen monkey anecdote demonstrating the powerful insidious effect of that problem. Banning learn to swim classes from schools is a perfect illustration of this silliness.

Ayn Rand's “The Fountainhead” and “Atlas Shrugged” are usually referred to in derogatory tones these days, but I for one identify with the wisdom that Sam was distilling from those sources.

Rachelle Towart - a fine example of why education is an essential key to Indigenous success and their future - a leader and role model in her own right.

We lifted the marriage bar so that women could continue to be employed in the Commonwealth Public Service as recently as 1966 and the very next year Australians voted overwhelmingly in a referendum to amend the Constitution with respect to our ATSI brethren. I won't go into which States and Territories were opposed to that measure or why at that time.

I will confess to being at the centre of the Mabo debate in 1993 and the associated discussions with Aboriginal leaders from around Australia. People like Noel Pearson, the Dodson brothers, Michael Mansell, Lowitja O'Donoghue, Peter Yu, David Pearce, David Ross and Peter Yu are just some of the names who represent the sort of role models, leadership and mentors that Rachelle was referring to.

Others like Russell Taylor, Jackie Huggins and Larissa Behrendt may be less well known, but they are no less effective. Our own Jack Waterford is a continuing burr under the saddle of Indigenous paternalism.

My mother's family settled here in 1841 where the Canadian Flag Pole now stands at Regatta Point near the Lake. They grew up with the Kamberry aboriginal tribe, the derivation of Canberra's name.

Rachelle rightly focussed on leadership - arguably there are more definitions of leadership than there are real leaders.

My favourite is "Someone who shapes and shares a vision that gives meaning to the work of others".

Shape, since it should involve others. Share, so that it is communicated widely and effectively. Meaning, because that's what people are looking for at work and in their day to day lives.

In my experience, the way to get meaning in your life is to devote yourself to family, friends and the community around you - and to creating something that gives you purpose.

Ray's remarks before morning tea referred to "The Power of One" perhaps unconsciously channelling Bryce Courtney who lived here and passed away earlier this year. That led to Fred Hollows as an excellent example of how one person can make an incredible difference.

In that vein, you may not know that there's a group of Canberra doctors and nurses led by Dr Peter Yorke of the John James Foundation who for many years have been going into the out back on an as needed basis up to eight times per annum at their own expense to undertake operations and health care among our Indigenous brothers and sisters.

The point is that everyone can make a difference in their own way.

That's the essence of Tony Coote's Goethe quote:

“Every person above the ordinary has a certain mission that they are called to fill.”

We are gathered here today as Members of the Order of Australia Association having already been recognised for our particular personal contributions above the ordinary.

All of which brings me back to Ray's: “Ok, so what do we do about it”, the “So what?” part of my three questions and Tony's “If not us, who? If not now when?” Mike Jeffery put it as the challenge for each of us as individuals and collectively as how to take all this forward through our Association.

Allan Hawke AC

Rydges Lakeside Hotel

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