

## **Sue Hart – Founders’ Day speech to Senior School**

Good morning Mrs Owen, staff, Grammarians and students

Thank you very much for inviting me to speak at this special Founder’s Day Assembly today. It is indeed an honour.

I am certainly not the brightest or best student to have gone through Canberra Girls Grammar School, but I am probably one of its greatest supporters over many years.

My family moved to Canberra when I was going into Year 11 – not necessarily a great time to change schools, but as a family we had moved around the country since I was seven so it wasn’t really a big deal. I had been at an all-girls school in Melbourne for the previous three years and it was not a terribly positive experience. I didn’t exactly fit the profile of students at that school and as a result neither worked to nor achieved my potential in most things apart from sporting pursuits.

It was decided that I would move to Canberra rather than remain as a boarder in Melbourne and fortunately my father was a persistent and persuasive man – I understand he spent some weeks convincing the school that, despite my reasonably ordinary academic record, it would be a great idea to accept me as a student in Year 11. And happily the school eventually agreed, and given the vagaries of the different education systems that operated across the States and Territories, enough subjects were identified that I could tackle and away I went.

It was particularly fortunate that the school swimming carnival is held in Term 1. I had done a lot of competitive swimming up to that point so did quite well really which meant that I became known fairly widely through the school very early on. I think the value of this became evident when the student leadership elections were held during the last term of that year and I was elected School Vice-Captain for the following year – people knew my name which is always helpful in an election context.

Coming from where I had been, I found this pretty amazing. And even more amazing (and beneficial given my father’s entreaties to the school), my academic endeavours improved out of sight despite, or perhaps because of, the wonder of being a school leader.

It became clear to me pretty early on that CCEGGS, as it was then, was a welcoming community and indeed that community was at the heart of all that it did. And it seems to me that this has only strengthened over the life of the school since its opening as St Gabriel’s School in 1926 with 10 pupils in the sheep paddocks, with Parliament House being built presumably at the end of the paddock. It’s a bit ironic really that the Hub building was designed with a glorious view of the New Parliament House, still just a paddock away.

I cannot imagine what the Anglican Community of the Sisters of the Church under the leadership of Sister Emily Ayckbowm must have thought when they arrived in the small community designated as the new Federal capital to set up a school to educate girls and young women in Canberra.

Think about it – the Sisters had come from a crowded England to a vast country with hardly any people at all by comparison, and specifically to an artificially created, embryonic city located to appease the political machinations of the time. I am not sure much has changed in 93 years. The population when they embarked on this venture at the behest of Bishop Radford would have been tiny and largely consisting of those involved in building the city and a few brave public servants and their families. Fancy having the foresight to see the potential in store.

Did the Sisters envisage the hardships of the school and the city in the early years? Would they have been bold and forward-thinking enough to envisage the successes the school and its students have lived over those 93 years?

I believe they understood both the potential and the risks and set about building a community that over the years has rescued the school when needed, supported its members and underpinned the growth and development by emulating the Sisters bravery and boldness. This courage and foresight is the basis upon which we educate young women today to prepare them for their future.

SO - having successfully negotiated my last two years of schooling, I went straight on to tertiary education here in Canberra – gap years were not quite the thing they are today and the thought of moving again so soon was unappealing; besides I could live at home which was a much cheaper option. After uni I thought a gap year or two might be a great plan but it was made fairly clear that getting a job was the preferred option for me so I got my first job in Federal politics, working in the Old

Parliament House on the staff of a female Cabinet Minister which was a fabulous introduction to the world of work – and that person remains the best boss I have ever had!

My working life is best described as eclectic – my CV reads as a journey with some straight bits on good roads and some interesting twists and turns on outback gravel roads as different opportunities and challenges presented themselves.

I've owned and operated a successful lobbying company; dipped in and out of jobs in Federal politics at various times (possibly a natural reaction to growing up in Canberra during many years of political turmoil and intrigue); worked at the Australian Sports Commission which provided a great opportunity to get really fit; re-trained as a chef when living in the UK for a number of years and working as a chef with a couple of the well-known chefs you see on TV and I even had the opportunity to cook for the Queen and various other Royals on occasion. I now run a family business where we run businesses for other people and organisations rather than them employing staff and running offices.

Clearly the model of the CGGS community, coupled with a family background of community service, had a significant impact on me. I sit on a number of Boards as a Director and work with others to improve their governance. I firmly believe in the need to put back into the community in which you live and work.

I re-engaged with CGGS when I returned from England as a single parent of two daughters, with the only two things confirmed in my life were moving back home with my parents for a short time, and my girls being booked into this school. In the period since leaving school, I had not had much to do with it at all – a not uncommon reaction with many only thinking about their own schooling when it is time to sort out their kids' education. This school was particularly supportive of the girls and me in a myriad of ways at a somewhat difficult time of life and I have been determined over the years to acknowledge that support and re-pay it where I could.

As is common in my life, however, I re-engaged with a vengeance. My daughters find it somewhat amusing that I only spent two years here as a student but have now spent more than 20 years actively participating in the life of the school in a number of roles – the Grammarians

Association, the Gabriel Foundation, the P&F, and the Board on which I am currently the Deputy Chair.

And in my family we have now come full circle. One of my grand-daughters, Juliet, started in the ELC this year and the other two, Eleanor and Catherine, will join the Junior School next year.

And one of the things I will instil in them is that as students you get to do a lot of things at Girls Grammar – for instance:

- you can see if you can set the record for undertaking the greatest number of co-curricular activities on offer while still meeting your academic requirements;
- you can join the debate about the merits of navy socks over white socks (as an aside, it is comforting to see that after all my years of involvement with Girls Grammar socks continue to be a source of debate);
- you follow in the footsteps of an intrepid group of brave women who believed in the value of educating girls and young women and set about delivering on that belief. This is the history you have inherited as a Grammarian, and it is a legacy for you to continue; and
- you are part of a community that will support you into the future and provide you with opportunities to support future members of this community.

Not bad really.

It would be presumptuous of me to offer advice about your future to such an impressive group of young women – there are plenty of people here much more qualified to do that.

But I would just say - be kind to yourself, to your community and the wider environment; be brave and daring and in so doing live the example of Emily Ayckbowm and the Sisters of the Church. Aim high and dream high and live a life well lived; put back as much or more than you take out; be prepared to change your world, even though at times this might be daunting; and above all take care with the mark you leave for others to follow.

And my aspiration for the future of Canberra Girls Grammar School is the day when we no longer have to justify the delivery of girls-only education or the costs involved in doing so; rather we will simply celebrate the education and life preparation we provide to all in our immediate community and those around us.

Thank you and I hope you enjoy the remainder of the 2019 Founders' Day, and particularly the currant buns as we set a new tradition based on the practices of the past.