

**HON. TOM STEPHENS MLC
MINISTER FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT
AND REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT**



**IONA PRESENTATION COLLEGE
PRESENTATION NIGHT**

PERTH CONCERT HALL

MONDAY 5th NOVEMBER 2001

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

**CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD, MR JOHN HIBBLE, AND
MEMBERS OF THE BOARD.**

**CONGREGATIONAL LEADER OF THE PRESENTATION
SISTERS, SISTER KATHLEEN LAFFAN.**

PRINCIPAL, MS MARGARET HERLEY.

OTHER DISTINGUISHED GUESTS.

STAFF, PARENTS, STUDENTS.

IT REALLY IS AN HONOUR TO BE INVOLVED IN THIS VERY IMPORTANT CEREMONY.

WHILE TONIGHT MARKS THE END OF ANOTHER STAGE OF SCHOOLING FOR EVERY STUDENT HERE, WE ALL APPRECIATE THE SPECIAL SIGNIFICANCE FOR THE YEAR 12 STUDENTS NOW ON THE VERGE OF THE ADVENTURES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF ADULT LIFE.

THIS YEAR MORE THAN ANY OTHER, GRADUATING STUDENTS MUST BE WONDERING JUST WHAT LIFE HOLDS FOR THEM IN A WORLD THAT CHANGED SO DRAMATICALLY TWO MONTHS AGO.

THE RECENT EVENTS PROVIDE YOU WITH AN OPPORTUNITY TO START YOUR ADULT LIFE WITH THE ATTITUDES AND PRIORITIES THAT REALLY COUNT – COURAGE, LOVE, COMPASSION, FORGIVENESS, RESPECT FOR EVERY RELIGION AND CULTURE, DETERMINATION AND STRENGTH OF SPIRIT.

PRESENTATION SISTER JOAN EVANS, WHO MOST OF YOU WOULD HAVE HEARD AT THIS CEREMONY LAST YEAR IS A FINE EXAMPLE OF ALL THOSE ATTRIBUTES AS SHE DEVOTES HER LIFE TO THE IMPOVERISHED PEOPLE OF BANGKOK.

AND YOU WOULD HAVE HAD A REGULAR REMINDER AS YOU WALKED THROUGH YOUR SCHOOL'S ADMINISTRATION OFFICE PAST THAT BEAUTIFUL JARRAH SCULPTURE CAPTURING "THE EMOTIONAL STRENGTH AND SPIRIT OF MARY".

THERE ARE ROLE MODELS AMONGST ORDINARY PEOPLE, TOO - PEOPLE WHOSE LIVES HAVE ILLUSTRATED JUST WHAT EVERY ONE OF US CAN ACHIEVE BY STRENGTHENING THESE QUALITIES AND BRINGING THEM INTO OUR EVERYDAY LIFE.

THERE IS NO BETTER EXAMPLE OF COURAGE THAN THAT SHOWN EXACTLY A YEAR AGO TOMORROW WHEN AMY FARLEY'S FATHER, BRIAN, AMONGST YOU IN THE AUDIENCE HERE, SWAM OUT TO FACE A SHARK HEAD ON.

I WANT TO TELL YOU TONIGHT ABOUT THE STRENGTH AND DETERMINATION DISPLAYED BY TWO ORDINARY WOMEN.

BOTH OF THEM CAME ACROSS SOMETHING THAT SEEMED WRONG – AND BOTH OF THEM DECIDED NOT TO LET IT GO. THEY TOOK UP THE CHALLENGE TO SEARCH FOR THE TRUTH. AND BOTH OF THEM SUCCEEDED.

ERIN BROCKOVICH IN THE UNITED STATES TOOK ON THE WORLD'S LARGEST UTILITY AND GAINED THE BIGGEST COMPENSATION SETTLEMENT ON RECORD FOR PEOPLE WHOSE LIVES WERE BEING SERIOUSLY THREATENED BY THIS COMPANY.

MANY OF YOU WOULD HAVE SEEN THE FILM *ERIN BROCKOVICH*.

FOR 40 YEARS, PACIFIC GAS AND ELECTRIC HAD BEEN DUMPING A CANCER-CAUSING CHEMICAL INTO UNLINED WASTE

PONDS IN HINKLEY, CALIFORNIA AT LEVELS UP TO 400 TIMES THE SAFETY STANDARD.

NOT SURPRISINGLY, THE RESIDENTS AND THEIR PETS WERE GETTING SICK.

THEY MADE NO ATTEMPT TO STOP DUMPING THE DANGEROUS CHEMICAL AND GAVE NO WARNINGS TO THE RESIDENTS. THEY WOULD HAVE GOT AWAY WITH IT HAD IT NOT BEEN FOR ERIN BROCKOVICH – AN ORDINARY WOMAN WHO WASN'T PARTICULARLY WELL EDUCATED AND WHO WAS RAISING THREE CHILDREN ON HER OWN.

ERIN GOT A JOB IN A LEGAL FIRM, WHERE SHE DISCOVERED THE COMPANY WAS GETTING INVOLVED IN REAL ESTATE AND WONDERED WHY.

SHE DUSTED OFF FILES, SEARCHED, SLEUTHED, FOUND SECRET REPORTS, INVESTIGATED, CONVINCED THE TOWNSPEOPLE TO TRUST HER AND JOIN IN GROUP LITIGATION – AND SUCCEEDED AT IT ALL.

THEY WON THE RECORD COMPENSATION OF \$333-MILLION. AS WELL, PACIFIC GAS AND ELECTRIC WERE ORDERED TO CLEAN UP THE ENVIRONMENT AND TO STOP USING CHROMIUM 6.

ALL BECAUSE OF ERIN BROCKOVICH. WHAT A MODERN-DAY DAVID AND GOLIATH STORY. A WOMAN WHO IS IN EVERY ONE OF YOU.

ESTELLE BLACKBURN IS A HOME GROWN HEROINE LIVING IN PERTH.

SHE CHANGED THE COURSE OF AUSTRALIA'S LEGAL HISTORY BY TAKING ON THE JUSTICE SYSTEM AND GAINING THE RE-OPENING OF THE CASES OF TWO CONVICTED KILLERS WHO HAD KEPT PROTESTING THEIR INNOCENCE BUT HAD EXHAUSTED EVERY LEGAL AVENUE TO PROVE IT.

SOME SECTIONS OF THE MEDIA ARE STARTING TO DESCRIBE ESTELLE BLACKBURN AS AUSTRALIA'S ERIN BROCKOVICH.

I MET ESTELLE IN THE EARLY '80S WHEN SHE WAS A JOURNALIST WITH THE ABC IN PORT HEDLAND. SHE WAS – AND SHE'S THE FIRST TO SAY THIS HERSELF – AN ORDINARY JOURNALIST LEADING A CAREFREE LIFE, SPENDING ALL HER SPARE TIME AND MONEY ON DANCING AND TRAVELLING.

TEN YEARS LATER SHE CAME ACROSS BY CHANCE THE STORY OF JOHN BUTTON, A MAN WHO HAD BEEN JAILED FOR KILLING HIS GIRLFRIEND 35 YEARS PREVIOUSLY.

BUTTON HAD SERVED HIS SENTENCE AND WAS STILL PROTESTING HIS INNOCENCE AND CRYING OUT FOR HIS CASE TO BE RE-OPENED AND HIS NAME CLEARED.

SHE HAD A BRIEF LOOK INTO HIS CASE, THINKING THAT MAYBE SHE SHOULD USE HER EXPERIENCE AND CONTACTS TO HELP

HIM APPROACH THE PREMIER, WHO SHE WORKED FOR AT THE TIME.

BUT SHE SAW SOMETHING ABOUT THE CASE THAT DISTURBED HER AND AS SHE LOOKED MORE AND MORE INTO BUTTON'S CASE, SHE FOUND FACTS THAT CONVINCED HER HE WAS INNOCENT – AND CONVINCED HER THAT INNOCENT, TOO, WAS ANOTHER MAN WHO HAD NEARLY BEEN EXECUTED FOR ANOTHER MURDER IN PERTH IN 1959.

HE ALSO HAD SERVED HIS TIME AND WAS GETTING ON WITH HIS LIFE. ESTELLE COULD HAVE EASILY LET IT GO.

BUT SHE HAD COMPASSION FOR THEIR PLEAS TO BE RELEASED FROM THE EMOTIONAL PRISON THEY STILL SUFFERED AND SHE FELT THERE WERE MISCARRIAGES OF JUSTICE THAT HAD TO BE RIGHTED.

SHE HAD TO GIVE UP FULL-TIME WORK IN ORDER TO RE-DO 35-YEAR-OLD MURDER INVESTIGATIONS. ALL ON HER OWN – AND SHE NEVER ONCE GAVE UP IN HER DETERMINATION TO GET TO THE BOTTOM OF IT – DESPITE IT TAKING SIX YEARS AND TOTALLY IMPOVERISHING HER.

SHE TOO SUCCEEDED. IN HER BOOK *BROKEN LIVES* SHE REVEALS FRESH EVIDENCE THAT CAUSED THE PREVIOUS GOVERNMENT TO RE-OPEN BOTH CASES.

I WAS PLEASED TO PLAY A SMALL PART IN THIS BY TAKING AN URGENCY MOTION TO PARLIAMENT CALLING ON THE GOVERNMENT TO ACKNOWLEDGE THE FRESH EVIDENCE AND ACT ON IT. AND I AM VERY PLEASED THE GOVERNMENT RESPONDED TO MY CALL – AND NOW LIKE SO MANY PEOPLE, I AM EAGERLY AWAITING THE APPEAL OUTCOME, DUE ANY TIME NOW.

WHAT’S SO SPECIAL ABOUT THESE WOMEN IS THAT IT IS PROOF OF THE POWER OF ONE PERSON WHO BELIEVES IN SOMETHING AND HAS THE STRENGTH OF SPIRIT TO SEE IT THROUGH AND TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE.

YOUR SLOGAN ‘IONA GIRLS MAKE A DIFFERENCE’ IS ONE FOR YOU TO REMEMBER THROUGHOUT YOUR LIVES.

USE WHAT YOU HAVE LEARNED AT IONA TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE – KNOWING THAT YOU CAN.

IN CLOSING I WOULD LIKE TO QUOTE FROM THE FRENCH POET APPOLLINAIRE:

“COME TO THE EDGE,” HE SAID

THEY SAID, “WE ARE AFRAID.”

“COME TO THE EDGE.”

THEY CAME, HE PUSHED THEM AND THEY FLEW”.

AND SO WILL YOU YEAR 12 GRADUATES.

MY BEST WISHES TO YOU ALL.
