

## ***KING'S COLLEGE COMMEMORATION DINNER***

### **THE TREASURE WITHIN OUR UNIVERSITIES**

Hon Justice Daubney, President of the King's College Council

Mr Sam Harrison, Chair, King's College Board of Fellows

Members of the College Council and Board of Fellows

Master and Senior Staff of Kings,

Distinguished Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

For any Kingsman, it is a great honour to be asked to speak at the Commemoration Dinner. It provides an opportunity to express our gratitude to the College and its giants of the past for the important contributions they have made not only to our lives but to our State and nation. Let me begin by adding my congratulations to the fine young Kingsman receiving awards tonight.

I too am proud to be a Kingsman, and yes, my wife did smile when I told her that I am now a Wise Wyvern. Old enough, she agreed, but wise? Well, maybe not, but at least smart enough to know that I must defend my claim that colleges like King's are the treasures within our universities – treasures that must be preserved and used in ways that enrich not only our country but humanity as a whole.

So how do we assess the true value of a University College like King's? The World Bank, OECD and market economists would simply compare the costs and rates of return to graduates who had attended a college with those who did not. But focussing attention solely on how much a degree costs and how much money one makes after graduation ignores the broader contributions made by our universities and colleges to our lives and nation.

King's aims to produce graduates who are not just well paid professionals, but leaders in their field, young men who combine competence with virtue, professionals dedicated to serving others with "spirit, honour and pride."

It would help if we had a few PhDs focussing on the contributions made by university colleges and the giants they have produced over the past 100 years. But I can only speak from personal experience. And after all, the hidden cost of attending a Commemoration dinner is having listen to old farts raving on about the good old days.

So back to 1957.

Queensland had but one University, and it had only 4,000 students.

Matriculation Day, my first day at UQ. Dressed in a second-hand academic gown, a new white shirt and black bow tie, I was obviously a first-year student from Kings. “We wear black bow ties at Kings,” we were instructed by senior students at the college, and woe betide a freshman caught not wearing one. The Vice-Chancellor stood on a dais and welcomed us to the community of scholars. Above him carved on the sandstone lintel facing the Great Court, the immortal words of Disraeli “A place of light, of liberty, and of learning.” What a real university is supposed to be.

In lecture theatres, labs and library at uni, I gradually developed expertise in the fields I was passionate about, Chemistry and Maths. But it was at King’s that I discovered what is at the heart of Disraeli’s conception of what a university is supposed to be, a place not only of learning, but of liberty and light.

Dinner and chapel were formal affairs demanding full academic dress. Grace, dinner, and after the odd bread ball had been thrown, we would race out of dining hall to listen to the Goon Show on the radio, part of the compulsory education of all college students. Then some study, supper, more study and, on many a night, debates about religion, politics and social issues long into the night. Living with, exploring ideas and working with others from a diversity of fields is very much part of college life. So too are mateships, as lifelong friends like Graham Maxwell and John Elkins can confirm. Also at College one has the good fortune to be mentored by men and women whose warmth, wisdom and humanity continue to inspire. Here I must pay a special tribute to both past and present Masters and Chaplains at Kings - men like Trigg, Grimmet, Mavor, Hunt and dare I add Greg Eddy..

As a boy, I was brought up in a strict, evangelical church, one in which its dogmas were not to be questioned. But at College, entrenched beliefs and firmly held ideological positions were challenged, and the light of reason and shafts of evidence battled to penetrate the walls of prejudice so carefully crafted during childhood and adolescence. Being confronted with a broader range of religious, political and social views and cultures, I began to read far more widely as I tried to resolve the conflicts they threw up. For me, it was at King's College that the real business of the university began - the inner voyage that leads to the opening of the mind, critical thinking and the quest for meaning and purpose in life.

Being a Kingsman, it was important to play hard, to win but to be fair, to be a good team member. Playing rugby was a delight: King's was a force to be reckoned with both on the football and the athletics field. We also excelled at swimming, largely because of one of the College's giants, David Theile. And it is great to see that today's Kingsmen continue to strive for excellence and win – well done gentlemen!

One annual event was the boat race. Not the serious one where college eights vied for the Head of the River, but the midnight race across the oval in front of Women's College. There was no boat as such, but eight freshers from each college lined up bum-to-bum and baby-like "rowed" across the oval, cheered on by older students and the girls. I can't remember if we won, but I do remember how cold a wet backside can get in Brisbane in August.

Upland Road used to be a dirt road. As we trudged to the university, we were covered in dust from the cars and trucks using the road. I decided to take action, getting the residents and students at Kings and Emmanuel to sign a petition to get the road sealed. Like a mosquito, I buzzed around the office of Lord Mayor, pushing to get the road sealed, and eventually winning. It was my first real lesson in how democracy works.

So some gratuitous advice to today's Kingsmen. If you think you are too small to make a difference, then you have never been in bed with a mosquito. But if you are a mosquito, you need to know how to bite, when to bit, and how to get under the net.

There are many tales I could tell about life at King's, about inter-college raids and being taken for a ride, about how we managed to relocate a car on the cloisters.

But three things stand out:

- the enduring friendships forged at college
- the help and guidance provided by our mentors
- the nurturing of the inner spirit that drove Ghandi, Martin Luther King, Nelson Mandela and all whose have contributed to making the world a better place.

At King's, I learned that even a tiny mosquito like me can make a difference. But to do so, you have got to have a dream and work hard at making it come true. My dream is a world in which knowledge and understanding dispel the ignorance and prejudice that enslave minds and lives, and to lay the foundations for peace, democracy and sustainable development. .

And so I am passionate about education. Early in my career I was a lecturer in science education at the University of Queensland and later Professor of Education at Flinders University. Progressively my research and work with international organizations came to the attention of the Australian government. In 1988, I was asked to be Australia's nominee for the top job in education in UNESCO. Gough Whitlam explained: "It is a tough job, a bit like being World Minister of Education. My government looks to you to provide the leadership in UNESCO needed to help its Member States to meet the challenges facing them."

Competition for the post was fierce, but Kingsmen fight hard, fair - and we win, don't we? And so, from January 1989 to mid-2000, I was in charge of all of UNESCO's education policies, programmes, institutes and offices worldwide.

Since World War II, UNESCO has played a key role in helping countries to build or rebuild their education systems as they moved towards democracy. And so during the 1990s, I was heavily involved in reshaping the education systems of countries

that were once part of the Soviet block. We also worked at the reconstruction of education systems in the aftermath of civil wars, genocides, and political and economic upheavals. It was a roller coaster ride: the highs of working with giants like Mandela and Havel, the lows of clashes with the Taliban and authoritarian regimes on their abuses of human rights.

One of the major problems facing the global community in 1989 was the growing number of children and adults without access even to the most basic education. In 1990, UNESCO launched a global Education for All programme. We worked hard pushing and supporting governments and international organizations to give priority to meeting the basic learning needs of all children and adults. The work we did has made a difference: the number of illiterates has fallen by over 200 million, and Universal Primary Education is now a reality in most countries of the world.

Most countries, rich and poor, know that education needs to be re-engineered to meet the challenges of our age. As the UN agency for education, UNESCO has played an important role at the global and regional level in facilitating reflection and debate on the kind of education we need for the future. I could go on to give an account of the work of the International Commission on Education for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, World Education Reports and Conferences, and much more. But the point of this Commemoration Dinner is to celebrate the contributions made by King's and Kingsmen over the past century. And my story is but one of the hundreds that King's graduates who have made a difference could tell.

Commemoration Dinners also provide an opportunity to reflect on the challenges facing university colleges like Kings.. The greatest challenge, I think, is that of re-asserting the role that colleges play in producing the type of leaders that we need to build a stronger and more equitable nation, and a better world.

In the past, universities were seen to be a public good, valued for the role they play in improving the quality of life of all through their teaching, research and service to the community. But in the global knowledge economy, higher education is now big

business. The trade in educational goods and services is being privatised and internationalised. With that, the focus in many of today's corporate universities is on money, management and position on league tables. Meanwhile, public funding for universities continues to be pruned, and the burden is shifting from government to students and their families.

The financial difficulties facing universities, university colleges and students are forcing them to focus more and more on money, and less and less on reaching out to serve others. As one of my friends who teaches in the MBA programme of a prestigious US university put it: "In this university, we no longer educate human beings – we train barracudas."

It is important to ensure that mounting costs do not mean that our university colleges become the bastions of privilege. Able students from disadvantaged backgrounds deserve to be given the opportunities to experience the richness and breadth of learning experiences provided by Colleges like King's. Thus we need to push Governments and corporations to provide more scholarships to enable indigenous and poor rural students to live in college. It makes good economic, social and political sense. At college, they are more likely to get the support they need to complete their degrees and to develop the leadership qualities that their communities so desperately need.

Good universities like UQ still will be places of learning and produce professionals with high levels of expertise, and there can be no doubt that we need that expertise. But to be outstanding, our graduates need to be more than excellent technicians. They must be driven by more than money and status. Their greatest value lies in the contribution they make to the common good.

I must admit that none of this is new. Some 2,500 years ago, Confucius set up an academy that was accessible to rich and poor alike. His academy sought to produce graduates who "combine competence with virtue." His dream was to produce leaders whose subsequent careers would bring about the ideal of a nation managed with integrity – something we could do with today. Similarly, the universities in the west that have stood the test of time have always seen their role as producing leaders who

are men and women of character as well as learning. For example, in his inaugural address as rector of St. Andrews University in 1867, John Stuart Mill insisted that the object of universities was “not to make skilful lawyers, or physicians, or engineers, but capable and cultivated human beings.”

A real higher education, the type of education we were fortunate enough to enjoy at Kings, unlocks the treasures within, bringing knowledge, thought and values together, giving meaning and purpose to our lives as professionals, as citizens, as leaders. I would submit, that heritage is worth fighting for. It is up to you, our young Kingsmen, to continue to that fight as you assume positions of responsibility in our nation and the global community. .

My title, *The Treasure Within Our Universities*, comes from one of La Fontaine’s fables. So let me conclude with a slightly adapted quote from *The Ploughman and His Children*:

*Be sure not to sell the inheritance  
Our forefathers left to us  
A treasure lies concealed therein.*

*But the old man was wise  
To show them before he died  
That education at King’s is the treasure within.*

KING’S  
COLLEGE  
FOUNDED 1912