

ADDRESS BY  
HER EXCELLENCY MS QUENTIN BRYCE AC  
**GOVERNOR-GENERAL OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA**  
ON THE OCCASION OF  
**90TH ANNIVERSARY OF ROTARY IN AUSTRALIA**  
MELBOURNE  
23 MAY 2011

Remarks by Her Excellency Ms Quentin Bryce, AC  
Governor-General of the Commonwealth of Australia

90th Anniversary of Rotary in Australia  
Melbourne

23 May 2011

The Right Reverend Dr Peter Hollingworth  
Former Governor-General

Mr Philip Endersbee  
President, Rotary Club of Melbourne

Distinguished guests

Ladies and gentlemen

I want you to know how delighted I am to join you here this evening at this very special occasion to mark the 90th Anniversary of Rotary in Australia.

I appreciate this opportunity, to honour the contribution that your outstanding organisation makes to our country, and what it has given to our community for generations now.

I am most grateful to you for the tribute paid to me this evening.

It touches my heart to be recognised as a Paul Harris Fellow, as I reflect on the life of the man it is named for.

I love the story of your founder, a lawyer coming together with three friends, a coal dealer, a merchant tailor and a mining engineer --- their commitment to growing the group, their decision that the business leaders joining them should meet regularly.

In those first years, meetings were rotated among members' places of business.

Thus the name Rotary.

It's a story you know well, but it's a story to tell again and again.

In it we find a source of courage, support and inspiration.

How could those four men ever have imagined, today in Australia, we would be celebrating the membership of 37,000 men and women in over 1,200 clubs, linked by friendship to 1.2 million Rotarians across the globe.

In 1945 Harris confided to members of Tuskegee Club in Alabama

- "my ambitions (in an international direction) were aroused, when the original idea of mutual helpfulness, evolved into general helpfulness which is epitomised into the ideal of service."

There's something lovely, it seems to me, in an observation of the time --- that almost every member of Rotary's first club, had arrived in Chicago from small towns, seeking the intimate acquaintanceship of their boyhood days.

I am certain that that need for friendship, for fellowship, played a key role

in the energetic development of Rotary in Australia in provincial cities and large towns, following the establishment of this Club in February 1921, and in other capitals soon after.

My friends:

We're all connected to Rotary in some way in 2011.

It's part of every community,  
serving, giving,  
respected, loved.

My own links were established when I was at boarding school in the '50s.

I won an Essay Prize donated by the Wynnum Club in Queensland:  
"How to Foster Peace and International Understanding."

What a high minded topic for a  
16 year old girl from the bush.

I look back with a smile on the noble ideals I kept tucked inside myself,  
of making the world a better place.

Indeed, they were the reason why I decided at that time to study law.

Oh youth, the strength of it, the faith of it, the imagination of it.

I look back too with affectionate nostalgia on the way Bryce family life was embedded in the Fortitude Valley Rotary in the '60s and '70s ---  
strategic, generous men with such vision, 'think big' capacity ---  
their wives, then called Rotaryannes, were the hardest workers, talented fundraisers,  
brilliant cooks who could do just about anything.

I am very proud to say that the  
Fortitude Valley Senior Citizens Centre set up by Rotary is named in  
Tom Bryce's honour.

But what I remember most was the genuine warmth, the camaraderie, that included me  
and taught me a great deal.

And of course all those were to stand me in great stead, during my career, and particularly  
in my community work.

I have been invited to speak at Rotary Clubs in little towns, regional centres  
and our great cities, across more than 30 years

I have valued enormously the platforms given to me, to talk about issues, ideas, hopes  
and aspirations, the things that I care about,  
children, families, equal opportunity for women, those with special needs,  
aged care, Alzheimer's disease,  
closing the gap in Indigenous health,  
the UN Millennium Development Goals.

These experiences have enriched my professional and personal life, and given me an understanding of what Rotary stands for, its breadth and depth of commitment, the dedication of its membership, and the way, 90 years on, you hold on to goodness as you serve.

That shines through in what you do and how you do it.

My admiration goes to the way you translate those noble ideals of making the world a better place at every level, grass roots, local, to international.

I must mention that significant step in 1989 when you adopted an amendment to the Rotary International Constitution to admit women.

I remember The Age reporting  
"The Rotary Club Melbourne broke its misogynist way"!

My friends  
I know that Clubs here this evening are involved in outstanding programs where they are desperately needed:

Polio Plus  
Rotarians Against Malaria  
Pakistan Flood Relief

Rotary's focus on developing young people will ensure that your values and principles, your altruism, are passed on from one generation to the next.

You encourage them in practical ways  
to strive, to reach their potential.

Through

- Rotary Centres for International Studies
- Scholarships for academic and investigative pursuits
- Peace and conflict resolution
- International relations

And those marvellous global student exchanges --- 9,000 a year. WOW.  
What a legacy.

I feel passionately about the value of these investments in young ones, in the opportunities to make lifelong bonds across nations, in those influential years of transition from boyhood to manhood, girlhood to womanhood.

In them lie the best hope, the best chance for peace in our world.

Often I think I see the best of Australia and Australians.

I'm sure Dr. Hollingworth would agree.

Certainly that is so at Investitures, when outstanding Australians are recognised for their contributions.

The awards that I always feel are enormously special are those for community service --- so often to people in small towns --- those places that are the backbone of our country, who are involved in everything --- including Rotary.

I can't imagine what we would do without them.

Philip Endersbee in his first Presidential speech at the Rotary Club in Melbourne said:

- “we need to embrace change, it is not always popular but we need to be better, bigger and bolder”

Words that he puts into practice every day in his key role.

I have watched with respect, Philip's leadership and teamwork skills, in our work together at Plan Australia, building capacity for the poorest children in the world, reaching across the globe.

In cricket too, as we negotiated the integration of the Women's game with the Men's to form the new body Cricket Australia.

Philip certainly made a difference in both fields, always with a progressive, inclusive, approach.

My friends

A great man of your city, Sir Zelman Cowen, my friend and mentor for many years, opined that the role of the Governor-General is to represent the nation to itself.

I carry his wisdom with me in this unique opportunity I have to serve.

Again and again I hear myself saying

“I wish you could have been there with me” ---

such enriching experiences

- in the red dust, with women elders in remote indigenous communities at Papunya, in Lockhart River, in the Tiwi Islands,
- in a Melbourne suburb, at a parenting program for young isolated mothers,
- in Afghanistan, East Timor with our ADF,
- commemorating Anzac Day at Hellfire Pass with 4 revered veterans,
- with frail aged people under the trees near Katherine,
- spooning out hot peas to little ones in an African village with AusAid workers,
- another visit to Grantham last week in the Lockyer Valley where many lost so much in the floods.

Tomorrow I'll be in Benjeroop, Murrabit, Kerang.

So many occasions where I feel so proud of my fellow Australians at home and around the world.

Like you Rotarians it's what they do, and how they do it.

With professional skill, toughness and compassion.

Thank you. Thank you for what you do.

I want to add a little postscript  
Philip asked me to talk about  
The Wedding.

Yes, it was an honour and a privilege to represent Australia there at the Abbey.

Formal, grand, in every aspect,  
but still a warm family occasion.

Two young ones --- all eyes.

A lovely party afterwards at the Palace.

I had to keep pinching myself.

But most of all I was struck by the wonder of a million people coming together in  
joyousness, peace and neighbourliness.

Where else would that happen?

Happy Birthday Rotary.