

**Fifth Annual Perth Modernian Society Oration**  
***Global Citizenship: Learning to contribute to and take part in a  
Wider World***

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I acknowledge the traditional owners of country throughout Australia and their continuing connection to land, sea and community. I pay my respects to the Noongar nation and their cultures, and to their Elders past and present, and thank them for allowing me to speak on their land.

**Introduction**

My five years in Perth Modern School were very happy ones and I am very grateful and honoured to be given the opportunity to come back to this auditorium to give the Fifth Annual Perth Modernian Society Oration for students and guests.

I was born in Como in 1940 and had been sent early to Como Primary School by my mother as a bright, precocious five-year old. I was then too young – only 11 - to take the Scholarship exam for all 12 year old Western Australians in Standard 6 to qualify for Mod, so I attended First Year at Kent Street High School and took the exam from there. At Kent Street I had been a top student in a mixed class of boys and girls but when I went on to Mod they required me to repeat First Year in a single sex class. I fancied I was still a top student, however when I took my first exams I scarcely made it to the middle of the class, competing against very bright girls from privileged WA suburbs. It was a good lesson in humility for me.

Those of us who studied Science and German went into co-ed classes for fourth and fifth year, but even then girls were discouraged from talking to boys. It was only when I was elected a Prefect that that rule was relaxed for us as we had to work together in student leadership of the school. The Head Girl for our year is here today, Wendy Snow Watts, and along with other prefects we have remained lifelong friends.

In 1953, all first years were called Fags and paired up with fifth year students. My Senior was a school prefect and that year all the girl prefects took their Fags in a group booking to see the film *Moon is Blue*, starring William Holden, David Niven and Maggie McNamara. We considered ourselves very grown up, as this was then a 1950s saucy sex comedy about a young woman who flaunted her virginity, but of course that film now seems very tame.

The other strong memories I have of Mod include spending an entire domestic science lesson learning how to iron a handkerchief with a flat iron heated on a gas stove, and to

bake an apple; standing on the stairs when I was a prefect checking that girls were wearing their ties and berets, and that their belts were not too tight, and measuring gym tunics, that were not allowed to be more than six inches above the knees when kneeling; editing the school magazine; captaining the PMS debating team and the school B hockey team; and playing Beethoven's Fifth Symphony at a school concert as a duet with Dudley Bastian, who is one of Perth's leading organists.

I spent lunch hours sitting on the girls' grass with a group of five of my close friends exchanging puns – I was with the best of our punners, Margaret Edeson, in her home in Canberra last week. She and I had the strong ambition to be medical missionaries in Africa sharing the books of Australian writer, Paul White, the Jungle Doctor of Tanzania. His books were very popular, translated into 80 languages and the subject of a radio show that ran for 25 years.

Those years at Mod from 1953-1957 were a formative period of my life and set me on the path to becoming a global citizen that is the subject I really want to talk about today. But before I move on, I want to encourage you to look around you to your friends and teachers here with you at this moment. Some of them are already your role models and will be strong mentors for you in the future, and some of them will stay close friends for over 60 years, as Wendy and Margaret and I have been since our school days. Throughout our lives, friendships give us the greatest support, inspiration and happiness. Here are two group photos of all the school prefects of 1957, and those who were able to attend our 50-year reunion in 2007.

As some of you may be aware, while I grew up in Perth and attended this same school as you, walked the same footpaths and remember and celebrate the same motto – Knowledge is Power - my journey since has taken me to some distant places, to over 40 countries around the world. You will recognise the importance of my education as I show you how I extended my travel following each educational qualification I received.

I would like to share some of my experiences and those of some famous fellow old Modernians and Western Australian scholars to encourage you to think of yourselves not only as a member of your nuclear family and suburban or state community but to be open enough to include the globe as your own neighbourhood. Our personal growth comes from working on our self development and responsibilities to our families and communities, but there is an increasing need to expand our horizons to the world as our family...more than ever today as we are all facing the same challenges of ever increasing extinction of species due to human exploitation and climate change.

## **One Shared World**

In 1972, the crew of Apollo 17 took the first 'Blue Marble' image of the entire planet Earth as they travelled back from the moon with the sun behind them illuminating our world. Those who viewed these photographs had a new understanding of how unique, how extraordinary and how related we all were in this small round planet in a huge expanse of space. That was a landmark moment because it brought home the understanding that we are all global citizens of the one shared world.

In 2015 we are still all global citizens. We all want similar things. We want to be healthy, peaceful and prosperous; share meals together; enjoy our work: and have safety for our friends and family. Our fellow global citizens do not want anything more than we do - just the same chances in life of health, peace and happiness. Being a global citizen is about committing to the common good, and taking small steps for each other's human rights and for our planet. One billion people around the world are still trapped in extreme poverty and many endure exposure to debilitating diseases, hunger and war. For the first time in history, with the rise of interconnectivity, social media, and collaborative policy and activity across nations we have the power to end this.

This morning I would like to review four major global challenges facing us all. There is a great need for our collective energy and minds to find solutions to climate change and ongoing threats to our health, also to make inroads on universal quality education, and to eliminate violence not only between warring factions but the more insidious widespread violence against women and girls. I would like to highlight the contribution that Old Modernians as well as some outstanding Western Australian scholars and citizens have contributed to research, leadership and development overseas and global advancement in these areas.

### **Finding Solutions to Climate Change**

The challenges of climate change include melting icecaps, threats to our marine life, loss of islands in the Pacific, agricultural disasters, ever new catastrophic diseases, and dire population predictions. I have become particularly interested in this subject since living and working in Bangladesh, the country that ranks first in the world as the nation most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change in the coming decades, and would like to show you some slides of its effects in both Bangladesh and the Pacific Islands.

Located at the bottom of the mighty Ganges-Brahmaputra-Meghna river system, Bangladesh is watered by a total of 57 trans-boundary rivers coming down to it. It suffers a high level of widespread poverty and increasing population density, has limited adaptive capacity and is poorly funded, with ineffective local governance. Much of the land is less than eight metres above sea level. There are 1,000 people in each square km and natural population increases by 2,000,000 each year. The rivers are gradually eroding the land as people find their homes in water after the monsoon rains and, on the other hand, their fertile land drying up in the summer.

Australia is strategically placed in the Asia Pacific region. Typhoons in Asian countries like the Philippines are causing increasing havoc, and in the Pacific, island nations are struggling to keep their land. In these images, Tokelauns protest against climate change during the Pacific Warrior Day of Action, and villagers on the island of Abaiang in Kiribati stand where their homes used to be.

In Australia, scholarship and research into climate change and renewable energy has seen WA at the forefront. The 2007 WA State of the Environment Report showed that south-western Australia is a global biodiversity hotspot and one of the earliest regions impacted by climate change, with many freshwater species and ecological communities already at the limits of survival. The State's natural resources, biodiversity, industry and human health are at risk, and in some instances are already being affected by reduced rainfall, runoff and declining groundwater levels, resulting in reduced river flow, disconnected river pools, drying wetlands, and loss of unique cave fauna. A Murdoch University research team, headed by Dr Jane Chambers, is involved in assessing the potential impacts of a drying climate on freshwater ecosystems, and the tool they are developing will be tested and modified to help manage groundwater dependent ecosystems across Australia as well as overseas, including providing quality drinking water to remote communities. I am proud that my niece, Dr Frances D'Souza, mother of one current Modernian and aunt of three graduates is involved in the research team and is with us today.

Old Modernian, **Professor Ross Garnaut**, 1955-59, has held a number of influential global positions, including Ambassador to China and Head of Division of the Papua New Guinea Department of Finance. He was appointed by the Rudd Government to examine the impacts of climate change on the Australian economy and recommend medium to long-term policies and policy frameworks to improve the prospects for sustainable prosperity that produced the significant Garnaut Climate Change Review.

Old Modernian, **Des Gaffney**, 1943-44, worked for 44 years in the National Climate Centre of the Bureau of Meteorology. He expedited the preparation and publication of the Public Weather and Maritime Services Handbooks, and specialised in marine meteorology, particularly the development of marine weather services.

### **Overcoming Threats to our Health**

The whole world was affected when news of Ebola and resulting fatalities came to our attention through television and radio. Last week we had the encouraging news that there has not been one case of the wild poliomyelitis virus in Nigeria for 12 months, leaving only Pakistan and Afghanistan affected. Images of both the Ebola epidemic and the effects of polio together with methods for combatting it are shown, We know that

there are possibilities for other health scourges to surface in the future and they must be tackled as global threats using global initiatives.

Old Modernian **Professor Bruce Armstrong**, 1957-61, medical practitioner, is a leader in cancer research and management, and an authority on the causes and prevention of skin cancer and melanoma, establishing its link with sun exposure. He has made important contributions towards the understanding of the causes and control of other cancers, high blood pressure and heart disease. To date, Armstrong has written close to 400 scientific publications and has presented his groups' findings at numerous national and international conferences and institutes.

Old Modernian, **Peter Graham**, 1953-54, is not so well known but is a great ophthalmologist who has been doing the same as Fred Hollows, but in a quiet way. Recently he was in Bali to continue the training program in cataract surgery for young Indonesian ophthalmologists for the South Kalimantan Mobile Clinic project. He and his wife have also carried out amazing work for refugees.

As well as Old Modernians, there are other notable West Australians who have contributed initiatives for improving health around the globe. I am very proud of my niece **Professor Ranjeni Thomas**, University of Queensland, who completed her medical degree at UWA, and is the lead researcher that developed a world-first vaccine-style therapeutic approach to treat rheumatoid arthritis, a debilitating disease affecting more than 450,000 people in Australia and millions of sufferers around the world.

In October 2002, Western Australian, **Professor Fiona Wood, of UWA**, led a team working to save 28 survivors of the Bali bombings suffering from between 2 and 92 per cent body burns, deadly infections and delayed shock. She was named Australian of the Year for 2005. In March 2007, following the crash landing of Garuda Indonesia Flight 200, she travelled to Yogyakarta, to assist in the emergency medical response for burn victims. Professor Wood has become well known for her patented invention of spray-on skin for burn victims, a treatment that is being continually developed, and skin cell suspensions are now used in surgery around the world.

**Professor Fiona Stanley**, UWA, epidemiologist is noted for her public health work, and her research into child and maternal health, and birth disorders. She was named Australian of the year in 2003. During her career, she has focussed on the importance of using population data to provide significant health, social and economic benefits to the community, including strategies to enhance health and well-being in populations; the causes and prevention of birth defects and major neurological disorders such as cerebral palsy; the causes and lifelong consequences of low birth weight; and patterns of maternal and child health in Aboriginal and Caucasian populations.

### **Providing Universal Quality Education**

Old Modernian, Professor Sir **Frederick Schonell**, 1914-17, completed his PhD at the University of London in 1931 focussing on the 'diagnosis and remediation of difficulties in spelling' and was Professor of Education in England and Wales before his appointment as at the University of Queensland where he introduced certificate courses to train remedial teachers and teachers of children with intellectual disabilities. His book 'Essential Spelling List (English Skills and Practice) containing over 3000 of the words most commonly used by children in their writing activities, is still being distributed by Amazon.

Old Modernian, **Vincent Noel Serventy AM**, 1929-33, was a noted Australian author, ornithologist and conservationist. He was a CSIRO researcher and teacher before beginning a career as a writer, lecturer and filmmaker. His documentaries led to Australia's first environmental program 'Nature Walkabout', and his work was distributed around the world, educating people everywhere.

Old Modernian, **Lyn Hancock**, 1953-54, photojournalist, wildlife photographer, teacher, writer, adventurer, hitchhiked through Africa and lived in the Canadian Arctic. She has raised numerous orphaned wild animals, including bears, cougars, eagles, puffins, raccoons, and seals; her experiences while doing so have formed the basis of her 20 books. Many have been touched by the magic of her storytelling or stimulated by her example and have gone on to leave their own unique mark on the world as writers, broadcasters, naturalists, filmmakers and conservationists.

I have been involved in education in several countries, including Bangladesh and Rwanda and would like to share some images of what their children experience, with poor equipment, overcrowded classrooms, and technological initiatives impeded by the shortage of electricity. The brave Pakistani Nobel Prize winner, Malala Yousafzai, is constantly advocating for girls' education – one of her powerful slogans being 'One child, one teacher, one book and one pen can change the world'.

Universal education is valuable not only for learning about the wider world and each other, but also in order to take part in meaningful employment, and to appreciate the limitations of the present world order and imagine a new one. Education is the key to peace.

### **Working for Peace and Eliminating Violence against Women and Girls**

Old Modernian, **Irene Greenwood AM**, 1913-1916, feminist, peace activist, political activist, broadcaster and writer was a tireless campaigner for over fifty years and a life or honorary member of many key international, national and state peace and women's organizations, including the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom. She organised the Annual International Women's Day rallies for years. She was also a

representative to congresses of the International Women's Suffrage Alliance and the International Alliance of Women.

Other Old Modernian contributors to peace have been **Annie Douglas**, 1928-30, specialist in the affairs of the United Nations, particularly in the area of decolonisation of UN trusteeship and non-self-governing territories; **Kim Beazley AO**, 1933-35, who in the 1950s was a strong supporter of the then robust Moral Re-Armament (MRA) movement; and **Ann Deveson AO**, 1943-45, writer, broadcaster, filmmaker and social commentator who helped establish the Schizophrenia Association of Australia.

More recently Australia has had a wake-up call spearheaded by Rosie Battye, 2015 Australian of the Year to deal with a world-wide scourge, affecting Australia and every country of the globe – violence against women and girls, which can happen to anyone, anywhere. Two women have been killed and three women suffered brain damage every week by intimate partner violence so far in 2015. Through this woman's powerful advocacy, domestic violence is now on the political agenda and widely discussed in the community.

I have been asked to show a little of the work I have been doing as a global citizen, so I am adding some slides of training I have conducted in Rwanda, Afghanistan and the Great Lakes Region of Africa. I worked in Rwanda for nine years, a country torn apart by the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi but that has made a remarkable recovery over the last 20 years under a powerful President, Paul Kagame, who has a policy of zero corruption and zero gender-based violence. Rwandan women police and army officers are making a remarkable contribution in United Nations Peacekeeping Missions in Africa and beyond. Rwanda's initiatives in combating gender-based violence lead the continent and I was privileged to train police, army and corrections officers from 14 African countries on these strategies. I also show illustrations of training in gender-based violence prevention I conducted for legal interns in Afghanistan and on gender mainstreaming for engineers and social scientists working in countries in the Nile Basin Equatorial Lakes.

## **Conclusion**

Perth Modern School has taught us all to think critically and creatively, and the value of education is in learning to take part in these global imperatives. An appreciation of global citizenship is a basic necessity in moving toward a sustainable international future.

I believe the concept of global citizenship encourages us to feel an integral part of humanity as a whole and seek inclusive responses for our shared future. This approach aims to honour the dignity of humanity and universal good. It can be understood as a contemporary interpretation and revival of the classical concepts of virtue, the good, the true, the beautiful and community.

There have been a lot of changes since I attended Perth Modern School, and a lot will change in your lifetimes. As Mod prepared me for my role in the changes being experienced in many nations, Mod is preparing you for coping with changes that are still to come. The world needs solutions but needs a new way of thinking; it needs people to think afresh. What is needed is a clean slate – ‘same old, same old’ is not going to cut it. We cannot keep working in silos because much of what we have tried in the past fails to bear the fruit that it has promised.

Change comes via small, intentional steps. Shaping a more just and gender equal world is a journey characterised by persistence. It is a long and often winding road. To have influence and to create momentum, we need to have a strong belief in ourselves, in finding and maintaining courage, in thinking creatively, and being ready to rewrite the rules as we seek justice for all Australians and all nations. And women and men need to work in partnership to affect the global change needed. Cooperation, collaboration and support for each other as global citizens are powerful and productive.

I challenge you this morning to reflect on what you will do with your one precious life, as you develop your sense of self, your compassion and empathy, your responsibility and privilege of dealing with injustice and becoming a global citizen.