



OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
VICTORIA

ATHENAEUM CLUB
FATHERS' AND DAUGHTERS' DINNER

Friday 31st August, 2018

Mr Ed Doble, President, Athenaeum Club

Fathers, daughters, grandfathers, granddaughters, and daughters-in-law

Ladies and gentlemen

First, I acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the land upon which we are gathering and pay my respects to their Elders past and present and to any Elders here with us this evening.

Tony and I are delighted to be here with you this evening. We were very pleased to receive your invitation, and I was particularly pleased to join the line of distinguished Victorians who have addressed this dinner before me.

I know you expect that I will make a few observations about fathers and daughters this evening, and I shall.

But first, conscious that this Club is celebrating its 150th birthday this year, I would like to talk a little about that significant anniversary.

Now, in historical terms, 150 years can be regarded as either a long or a short time, very much depending on your perspective.

I must say that, for my part, as each year rolls around, a 150 year period is sounding increasingly shorter!

I wonder if, like me, some of the fathers or, perhaps, grandfathers in the room, are somewhat surprised – indeed shocked – to realise that they have witnessed a considerable portion of that time!

In any event, when I think of the 150 year lifespan of this Club, I am struck by the sweeping changes our State has experienced during that time. The stunning stained glass windows that we saw as we ascended the stairs before dinner attested to that.

At the same time, I am equally struck by the number of things that – despite the passage of all those years – have really not changed at all.

As to the latter, I have no doubt at all that the special love and connection between fathers and daughters, and grandfathers and grand-daughters, truly traverses the ages.

But, as promised, let me come back to that shortly.

There can be no argument that the 150 year span of this Club's life has seen change on a momentous level.

THE CHANGES – Technology

First, and obviously enough, we have seen extraordinary technological leaps since 1868.

I am not just talking of amazing advances like the telephone, motorcar, passenger plane, television, computer, internet, smart phone or even robots.

The Athenaeum Club was born at the time when the first electric lights were only just coming to Melbourne!

We, at Government House, are often reminded of that timing, as the House was completed in 1876, close enough to the time of your Club's beginning, and we still see the original gas light brackets across our walls. Electricity only came to the House some years later.

Indeed, electric lighting was not universal until late in the 19th century. Mind you, true to Victoria's sporting roots, despite its still limited application, as early as 1879, electricity was used to light up the MCG. Yes, the first night footy match was played in August that year, illuminated by temporary electric lights.

We've always had our priorities right, here in Victoria!

I've reflected that it must have been quite easy to deliver the odd blow behind play.... electricity or not, there certainly wasn't any 19th Century video replay!

THE CHANGES - Medicine

If we think of stark changes over the last 150 years, medicine is, obviously enough, particularly fertile ground.

When the very first members walked through the door of this Club in 1868, their life expectancy was just 44 years. Those who sign up in 2018 can expect to live almost four decades more - until 81 years of age.

For the members who join up in another 40 years time, they can expect a life expectancy of some 95 years, (or 97 for women.)

That huge extension to life is not surprising.

In the 1860s, Louis Pasteur was only just working on his germ theory of diseases, and it was only in the 1870s that the first vaccine for cholera was devised, followed then by vaccines for rabies, and later tetanus, typhoid fever and the bubonic plague.

And pain relief in those days was also markedly different. In the late 1800s, cocaine was not only legal, but readily given to children to combat the pain of a toothache. It was even used sometimes as a cure for shyness in children. Perhaps that's not surprising, given that it was also popular at the time to add as an extra bit of 'whizz' to an adult's gin and tonic!

I wonder if that ever happened here at the Club!

Today, we are on the brink of so many extraordinary medical advances. 3D printers are creating organs for transplant. Robotic technology can continue to improve surgical outcomes. And stem cell research is promising to be the 'holy grail' for some of the most stubborn diseases that ravage populations across the globe.

None of those things could have been imagined, as gents checked their top hats at the Club's door in 1868.

THE CHANGES - The Population

Although Melbourne is now experiencing a particularly rapid population growth, it is not for the first time.

Around the time the Club started, Melbourne had just overtaken Sydney as Australia's most populous city: something that is expected to happen again within the next decade.

Our population had suddenly swelled from under 100,000 to a massive 540,00 in the 1850s – a sixfold increase – due to the gold rush.

Of course, before the gold rush, nearly all of the arrivals to Victoria were British and Irish. But gold brought people from other places, including a sizeable group from China, so that our popular Chinatown was established way back in 1854.

Today, our 6 million Victorians come from more than 200 countries. More than one-quarter of us speak languages other than English at home. We follow more than 130 different faiths.

Quite a change!

THE CHANGES - Work

When it comes to change, we talk very often of the changing face of the workforce: of the impact of technology and the rapidly changing demands for various skills and occupations.

Certainly, the 19th and early 20th Centuries saw many careers that are entirely obsolete or, at least, rare today.

When the Athenaeum Club first opened, the city streets and lanes saw icemen delivering the ice as the means to keep food fresh; lamp lighters to manually light, fuel and extinguish the street lamps; rat catchers paid by the government to reduce the spread of infections; and nightsoil men who removed....well, 'waste', because there was no sewerage.

Yes, the Athenaeum Club was born into the streets of what had become known satirically - instead of 'Marvellous Melbourne' - as 'Marvellous Smellbourne'! Open drains, dumped waste and putrid water from the Yarra, left a very noticeable stench.

Fortunately, today we have refrigeration AND sewerage.

We also have occupations that could never have been dreamed of in the 1860s. We have data scientists, social media professionals and bio-waste specialists. We have privacy officers, autonomous vehicle designers and seed capitalists.

And what a change we see in career structure. Even until relatively recent times, a professional career often meant decades spent with the same firm or company, something that may well be the experience of some in the room.

But for the young people here, it is estimated that you are likely to have up to 17 jobs across five different industries in the course of your working lives.

Not something anyone would have dreamt of in 1868!

THE CHANGES - Women

And so that brings me to the changing role of women across these years.

It has, of course, been quite dramatic. And, of course, I want to touch upon it!

Times were very different at the time when this Club opened. All of the women in this room can contemplate what it might have been like to be born then.

On the bright side, women certainly had a wide choice of husbands. In some parts of the colony then – unlike now where women outnumber men, albeit by just a small amount – there were 13 unmarried men for every one unmarried woman!

But once married, a woman born in the 1860s, would give birth to an average of five babies, as opposed to just 1.8 babies today.

Of course, in the 1860s, married women were not expected to work. (At least not for money. They always did plenty of unpaid work.)

At the time the Club opened its doors for the first time, it was still 40 years – four whole decades – before women were even allowed to vote in State elections.

And then it was thanks to the tenacious and persistent work of those in the Women's Suffrage Movement who had, across the years of their sustained agitation for the vote, at least achieved the right for women to study at university, and for married women to own property in their own names.

They also achieved the biggest petition in the world at the time. Thirty thousand signatures, calling for the vote.

The Women's Suffrage Petition still exists in our Public Records Office. It is so big that it takes three people three whole hours just to unroll it!

As an aside, it is interesting that one of the main objections to women voting was that it would provide married men with 'double the voting power'. That is, the critics made the assumption that wives would blindly adopt their husband's view and vote for their husband's preferred candidate or party.

Anyway, thanks to the perseverance of many who have come before, women today can pursue careers of their choice. You young women have much to look forward to in that regard.

That said, there is still work to be done to achieve equality.

In business and industry, only around 20% of our top 200 company board positions, and a terribly low 5% of Chair and CEO roles, are held by women.

The pay gap has still not been conquered. Australian women are paid, on average, 15% per cent, (something like \$250 per week) less than men.

The latest World Economic Forum Global Gender Gap Report ranks Australia as only 35th in the world when it comes to gender parity.

Australia's economy and the community still do not profit from the input of 100% of our considerable pool of talent.

I think a fair summary of the last 150 years is that there has been much progress for women – and there is still much work to be done.

But let me turn to what has not changed across the last 150 years.

WHAT HASN'T CHANGED – The Democratic System

If you want to feel optimistic, you need to look no further than a fundamental pillar of our society that has mostly not changed. That continues to stand the test of time.

Our Westminster system of democracy continues to stand strong. The first Parliament of Victoria was elected in 1856. And since then, our State has enjoyed uninterrupted democracy.

Free elections, the separation of powers, the rule of law. They are our constants.

And as the Governor's role provides one of the checks and balances in that system, I appreciate, more than ever, just how precious and robust a system we are fortunate enough to enjoy.

WHAT HASN'T CHANGED - The Knowledge State

Victoria is, and has always been, 'the knowledge State'.

We are blessed with excellent and highly ranked universities. The University of Melbourne –

even older than this Club, having been founded in 1853 – is one of the foundation stones of our 'Education State'. It is ranked as our nation's top University, and an extraordinary 32nd in the world.

Melbourne is one of only three world cities to have two universities in the global top 30 biomedical rankings. And Melbourne is also ranked in the top three global cities as the best student city.

Each year, we have more than 175,000 international students flocking to our shores for a world class education.

Add to that our magnificent State Library of Victoria – just listed as the fourth most visited library in the world – and our special status as a UNESCO City of Literature.

The CSIRO was founded in Melbourne, as was the leading vaccine and bioscience behemoth, CSL. The Cochlear Implant comes from here. We have world renowned research institutes, scientists (including Nobel Laureates) and thriving biomedical precincts at Parkville and Monash.

'Knowledge' is and has always been a part of our DNA.

WHAT HASN'T CHANGED -Design

Melbourne is also a good-looking city.

Many of our magnificent buildings, funded by the riches of the gold rush, and set amidst the symmetry of the Hoddle Grid, are surrounded by the green belts set aside by the first Lieutenant-Governor, La Trobe, in the colony's earliest days.

We can all be proud that Melbourne has been beautifully designed and artfully executed.

From Collins Street and its many notable public buildings, to the Royal Botanic Gardens. From the cathedral spires to the domes at Flinders Street Station, and to Government House. Melbourne remains marvellous.

And we can add liveability to our credentials, being voted by the Economist as the world's most liveable city for seven consecutive years, and in the world's top three cities since the ranking began.

WHAT HASN'T CHANGED - Sport and the arts

Despite the endless circuit of change, our love for sport and the arts is an enduring part of Victoria's personality. Both have been a part of the fabric of our city from its early days.

The National Gallery of Victoria is the most visited gallery in Australia, and in the top 20 most visited galleries in the world.

Victoria boasts the very first symphony orchestra in Australia, in our magnificent MSO. And the Australian Ballet is headquartered in Melbourne.

Sport has always been central to our way of life here.

We host major events on the national and global stages, such as the Melbourne Cup, the Grand Prix and the Australian Open.

But perhaps our most important claim is that Australian Rules Football – possibly the best sport ever to be conceived by humankind – was borne in Melbourne in the 1850s.

And our own Melbourne Cricket Club – 'the G' - is today one of the largest stadia in the world, and hosts numerous sporting events, attended by 80,000 to 100,000 people.

WHAT HASN'T CHANGED - Fathers and daughters

I don't want to alarm you, but I think that finally brings me to the ACTUAL topic for this evening!!

The precious father/daughter relationship.

There are certain truths that transcend the passing of time, including the many decades I have figuratively traversed this evening.

They are the emotions that cannot be changed by technology or other inventions across the passage of time. They are the enduring threads of human existence. The love and the ties between family members that go to the very heart of all that we think, feel and do.

The relationship between father and daughter is one such truth.

Now obviously, I can't speak as a father, nor even as a close observer of the father/daughter relationship in my own adult family, as we have raised only sons, not any daughters.

But I can speak of it in other capacities.

First, from my professional experience as a Children's Court magistrate and later some 18 years as a judge in the Family Court of Australia, where I have heard much expert evidence about the formative bond that is so important to the healthy development of a girl.

Much more importantly, I can talk about that bond, as a daughter.

My father lived until he was 96. He was fortunate to come to Australia from Europe, as a teen in the late 1920s.

He was absolutely committed to our education. For his daughters as well as his sons.

(I am sure that he was well motivated when he would question me quite earnestly as to where I thought I had gone wrong on an exam if I had 'failed' to obtain a full 100%, even if the 'shabby' mark was just a few points below!)

His good fortune in reaching this lucky country was never for one moment overlooked by him, and we were encoded with his love for it, his commitment to the community and the need to protect its rights and freedoms and welcoming nature, and the desire to give back in any way that we could.

I wish my father could have seen me inaugurated as the 29th Governor of Victoria.

And so, it is a great joy for me to be amongst fathers and daughters, grand-daughters, great-granddaughters and daughters-in-law this evening.

The love and the pride in the room – flowing in equal measure in both directions – is palpable.

It prompts me to think about the current ‘Male Champions of Change’: the influential group of men who have stepped up to take action against gender inequality, recognising that inequality is not just a women’s issue, but one that, for our collective prosperity, is an issue for all.

Some of the men in the room this evening may have participated in this important group.

But, to my mind, each one of you – whether wittingly or not – is a male champion of change.

You are the authors of the best form of change: by encouraging your daughters and grand-daughters to reach their full potential. Instilling in them that no path should be closed to them simply because of gender. Gifting them the confidence to pursue whatever path they choose for themselves.

I must say that when I think of Victoria in 2018, compared with 1868, I am glad that I am alive today.

There is so much to celebrate in our growing, diverse, beautiful, clever and vibrant State. And when I look at the next generation of Victorians – including the young women with us this evening – I feel optimistic about their tenacity and agility. Their wisdom and worldliness.

You are the ones who will contribute next to the ‘peace’ and ‘prosperity’ expressed in our State motto.

And that’s what I wish for each one of you.

Set against the landscape of perpetual movement and the marching of time, we can all continue to work together for Victoria’s ‘Peace and Prosperity’.

And so may I conclude with a toast. Including all the 'variations' and 'descendants':

To fathers and daughters.