

## ROTARY SPEECH, HIGH POINT, 6 NOVEMBER 2003



*Derran Moss, Australia  
World Peace Scholar*

When confronted with a crowd such as this, I am often reminded of the words of the Duke of Wellington before the Battle of Waterloo, as he reviewed his troops, “I don’t know what effect they will have upon the enemy, but they sure scare the hell out of me.”

I should start by saying that I am a firm believer in the Elizabeth Taylor school of public speaking, because as she would say to her husband, “I will not keep you long.” In the same vein, I am often reminded of an anecdote about Winston Churchill when he attended a dinner in his honour at Yale University. The dean, whose job it was to

introduce Mr Churchill commenced a stirring speech in the British Prime Minister’s honour, starting with the letter “Y” in Yale as standing for “youth”, then “A” for “achievement”, “L” for “leadership” and finally “E” for “excellence”. The introduction took just under an hour. Churchill commenced his much briefer address by simply saying “Thank you. We should perhaps be glad that this is not the Massachusetts Institute of Technology”. Suffice to say, I hope that I shall not leave you in the same frame of mind as the woman who accosted Mr Churchill at a dinner party stating in a loud voice “Sir, if I were your wife I would put poison in your coffee.” To which the reply came “Madame, if you were my wife, I would drink it!”

But perhaps now that I have dispensed with the completely out-of-context Churchill references, I can tell you why it is that you have been burdened with such an unruly looking chap under the auspicious-sounding title of Rotary World Peace Scholar. Now normally when I start a rant like this, people are already scrambling for the exits, or at the least are trying to gnaw through their restraints. And while that really is fun to watch, I thought that perhaps, today is not that day. I could explain that I was a barrister masquerading as a public servant impersonating a university student, or that I worked as a teacher for four years, ran workshops in a prison for two, and was arrested in the Ukraine once. I could. But perhaps I won’t. Perhaps instead, I should shed some light on why it is that I wished to be a Rotary World Peace Scholar and why it is that I feel that this program has so much to offer. And in many ways it is best summed up in the words of Benjamin Disraeli:

“We must believe with all our heart and soul and strength that there is such a thing as truth, and to strive for it with the soul of a martyr and the intellect of an advocate.”

For me, being a Rotary World Peace Scholar is about finding the right questions and then searching for the best answers. It's about refusing to accept the world as it is, and not shutting up until something is done. It's about moving outside my comfort-zone and throttling every last experience out of life. And most of all, it's about meeting others from around the globe, who share similar ideals, but completely different ideas.

Ladies and gentlemen, terrorism is not the greatest threat to our lives.  
Osama bin Laden is not our worst enemy.  
And military might is not our best weapon.

The greatest threat to our lives is inaction.  
Our greatest enemy is apathy.  
And our best weapon is education.

But sadly, the headline “WAR ON TERRORISM KILLS OSAMA BIN LADEN” is going to shift a heck of a lot more copy than the headline “WAR ON INACTIVITY EDUCATES APATHETIC CITIZENS”.

But it is our inability to act that threatens our lives. Our failure to care, our ignorance born not from a lack of information, but rather, from our unwillingness to seek out the best information.

Sadly this is not the much-prophesied “New World Order”.  
This is “New World Order: Lite”.

It is in this “new world order” that . . .

I don't want child labour, but I want to wear Nike.  
I don't want pollution, but I want to drive an SUV.  
I don't want censorship, but I do want a “patriotic press”.  
I don't want discrimination, but I do want immigration regulations.  
I want to preach, but I do not want to practice.  
I want democracy but I don't want to vote.  
I want liberty and I will crush you to prove it.  
I want freedom and I will force you to accept it.  
I want truthful politicians but I refuse to accept they may lie.  
I want news but refuse to search for it myself.  
I have more information than ever before, but I use less of it.  
I drive bigger cars and have fewer people in them.  
The few eat more and the many eat less,  
. . . while the many produce what the few will discard.  
The world is smaller, but people are getting further and further away.

I can email, snail-mail, SMS, MMS, fax, beep or buzz you. I can smiley-face or frowny-face you, block sender or spam you. I can have bad spelling, no vowels, poor grammatical structure, weak narrative flow, zero punctuation and no indication of who I am, and still describe to you what happened last night, who won the Oscars and what I'll be wearing to dinner in twenty-three characters or less, but I can't seem vocalise my opinions on my country threatening to kill thousands of people on a daily basis.

My life is so terrible that the biggest threat to it is deep vein thrombosis on an economy-class flight home . . . Or so appears the state of the world.

A few years ago in Australia, we had a politician who claimed that she wanted an "ordinary Australian" in charge of the country.

Well, nuts to that. I could not more vehemently disagree.

I do not want an ordinary engineer to build my bridges.

I do not want an ordinary mechanic to fix the brakes in my car.

I do not want an ordinary vet to stitch up my dog.

And I do not want an ordinary surgeon to perform the quadruple by-pass open-heart surgery on me that two years of eating at the university cafeteria will one day necessitate.

And I do not want ordinary people to run the world. I want the extraordinary. The outstanding. The best of the best. And then some.

But it seems that the extraordinary is difficult.

When it comes to conflict, to waging war, to inflicting pain, the human species would appear endlessly inventive. The entire history of technological innovation and advancement, not to mention vast tracts of philosophical debate, are linked intrinsically to conflict, warfare and the never-ending quest to perfect our capacity to kill.

Sadly, however, our capacity to wage peace is nowhere near as well developed.

As the current political climate would seem to demonstrate, the first and often over-riding impulse of many countries, when seeking to wage peace is to wage war.

When it comes to peace, where is that same spirit of creative invention, that spark of genius and inspiration, which can conceive of a bouncing anti-personnel mine, laser-blinding rifles, multiple entry neuro-toxic warheads and high-tension, coil-sprung razor wire?

For me, this is all a decided lack of the extraordinary.

For me, this is where things get difficult.

And consequently, the last twelve months have forced us all to ask difficult questions. Difficult questions as to how we see ourselves not only within the relative safety of our suburban communities, but how we see ourselves in our country, our region and our world, as individuals, as a group, as a country. We have been pressed to ask:

“Can I love my country, but not what it does?”

“Can I love my country but not who it elects?”

“Can I be a patriot and still say no?”

“Can I be a patriot and still ask why?”

“Can I support then troops but not the war?”

President Bush said in an address only this morning that: “Freedom is worth fighting for. Freedom is worth dying for.” And I agree. But what of the statement “Freedom is worth *killing* for”?

These are all difficult and complex questions in difficult and complex times. And it should come as no surprise that there have been no easy *solutions*. But there have been easy *answers* . . . lots of them. In fact, there have more often than not been more easy answers than there have been questions. For the seemingly simple query of “What is this all about?” what have we been told?

It’s about terrorism.

It’s about security.

It’s about principles.

It’s about values.

It’s about policies.

It’s about reactions.

It’s about politics.

It’s about culture.

It’s about religion.

It’s about survival.

It’s about oil.

It’s about power.

It’s about freedom.

It’s about punishment.

It’s about revenge.

It’s about justice.

It’s about them.

It’s about us.

We have been Fox force-fed these answers to questions we can not even begin to articulate and as such, we have lived in a simple and easy polarized depiction

of a difficult and complex multi-polar issue. And we have been told that we have to choose.

US or France.  
Freedom or tyranny.  
United Nations or United States.  
Terror or democracy.  
Your family or their's.  
Us or them.  
With or against.  
Dead or alive.

These have been times . . . when two men are sentenced to death in Indonesia and Australia, a nation that abhors the death penalty, cheers it on; . . .when an Australian citizen is abandoned by his government in a foreign country because the possibility of free trade is simply too enticing. These are times when a country can elect Arnold Schwarzenegger as Governor of California.

Ladies and gentlemen, these are times when blind patriotism can incite even the former President Bush to proudly declare, "I will never apologize for the United States of America, I don't care what the facts are".

These are times when words like truth, justice, duty and loyalty have taken on lives of their own, definitions colliding with rhetoric, colliding with common sense. They have been times when asking questions of our governments has been an act of civil disobedience and when an act of civil disobedience has been an act of treason.

And they have been times when we cannot afford to delude ourselves into thinking that all is well, we are right and good will triumph.

In short, when despite all the CNN coverage and Fox News propaganda that black is black and white is right, world affairs have sadly been difficult and complex.

Why, you ask? Because this is not simply a polarized debate between war and peace, no matter Leo Tolstoy would tell us. It is more difficult because peace is a tough sell. Peace is a beautiful idea, a noble goal and a desirable state of being, but ladies and gentlemen, peace is a tough sell. Peace is tough, because at the bottom line, the cost of peace is expensive.

If the cost of peace tomorrow is to be lives today, are we really willing to pay?

Would we pay if the cost of peace was petrol at five dollars a litre?

Would we pay if the cost of peace was doubling taxation?

What if it meant only owning one car and only having one child?

What if it meant giving up our backyard, limiting our freedom and undertaking compulsory military service?

Those who claim that everyone wants peace and that its price can never be too high should be treated with extreme suspicion, because peace is the most difficult of all.

Well then, if all this is so difficult, you ask, then what is the answer? Contrary to the sacred teachings of Hollywood, peace is rarely won with guns. The absence of conflict maybe, the end of hostilities possibly, but peace? Not likely. The answer to that must lie somewhere else. The tools are something more. Peace, that cantankerous, slippery, troublesome, finicky state of the extraordinary needs a different champion.

The UNESCO Constitution includes the statement that “Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed.” And through the Rotary Peace Scholar program I truly believe that the construction of these defences is well under way.

These defences are not bound by national borders. And nor is the Peace Scholarship Program, which looks for those who are willing to move beyond borders and into ideas.

These defences are not built upon one single stream of thinking. And nor is the Peace Scholarship Program, which supports education specialists, international relations theorists, conflict investigators and public policy makers, to name only a handful.

These defences are not built upon abstract theory. And nor is the Peace Scholarship Program, which combines theory with seminars, workshops, internships and a constant stream of overly lively “discussion”.

And nor are these defences built upon rote-learning, nor indoctrination, nor acceptance of the status quo, nor obedience to social norms, the laws of common sense or even patriotism. For me, these defences are built upon dissent, debate, discourse and drive. They are built upon a foundation of intellectual rigor and spiritual fortitude.

The defences of peace require creativity, passion and inspiration. They demand commitment, drive and integrity. And they are only effective when unfettered by stereotypes, preconceptions and myopia. As Abraham Maslow said “When the only tool you own is a hammer, every problem begins to resemble a nail”. And thus, the Rotary World Peace Scholar Program is about finding, imagining and inventing the tool to construct these defences.

Peace is difficult, so it is not won by complacency. It is complex, so it can not be won with mere consent. And above all, peace is extraordinary, so it can never tolerate silence. Peace requires an open heart, an open mind and an open mouth.

But perhaps most of all, peace requires courage. Courage to say no, courage to turn against the tide and courage to maintain our course while all those around would turn you to theirs. In the words of Amelia Earhart "Courage is the price that life exacts for granting peace."

And this is why in the current global environment, where the difficult and the complex have become our everyday struggle, the Rotary World Peace Scholarship is so important. Because it is a program that specifically calls out to those who question, those who doubt, those who query, those who refuse to accept. The vocal, the spirited, the cantankerous, the slippery, the troublesome. It calls out to those who want to ask the right questions and find the best answers. The extraordinary answers.

Ladies and gentlemen, I stand proudly before to proclaim that Rotary is the pig. It is the pig not only because it is willing to get dirty, it is noisy and it doesn't mind kicking up a stink. Rotary is the pig because, just as in the farmer's breakfast of bacon and eggs, while the chicken has made a contribution, the pig has made a *total commitment*. And the Rotary World Peace Scholarship Program is a total commitment from Rotary. Rotary has realized that when it comes to peace and conflict resolution, the time for contributions is over. The time for *commitment* is at hand.

Peace is a tough-sell. It is an expensive goal. It is frustrating, difficult and it requires near limitless commitment, patience and passion. Rotary has not chosen the easy path, nor the simplistic solution. And so this is the gauntlet before myself, before all of the Scholars and before all of you. *And we shall not fail.*

As I continue in this program therefore, I bear always in mind the words of Gladstone Williams:

"Life was not meant to be easy, but have courage my child, it can be delightful."

I can only hope that the program continues to challenge me, continues to test me, continues to force me to have courage and maybe, just occasionally, is delightful.