

Robyn Archer - Address to La Trobe University Mildura Graduation 28 May 2010

I acknowledge that this ceremony has taken place on the traditional lands of the Barkindji and Latje Latje peoples and I pay my respects to their elders past and present, Deputy Chancellor, Pro Vice Chancellor, Deans, Director Neil Fetting, Mildura Staff, visiting staff and most important, graduates.

Today marks a mile stone in your careers and your lives. Some of you are about to step into your active profession for the first time and some of you are already working there. The disciplines celebrated today, the paths you have trained for, cover the most important areas in which the future of Australia will be determined. Because you made the courageous choice to undertake the rigors and sheer hard work of tertiary education and have family and friends willing to share that burden with you, you will now be an active player in that future. Education, Health and Social Welfare, Law and Management, Humanities and the Arts - it almost describes life itself. The good education of future generations is the key to our future. Without good healthcare, social welfare and practice across the generations, we have no rosy future. Perhaps, no future at all. Just laws and fair management practice will determine what kind of future Australia has and for all of us art and design will continue to stimulate the imagination and awaken us to the possibilities of a richly textured life of the senses and of the mind.

As an Australian, I thank you sincerely for the efforts you've made to equip yourselves with the skills and intelligence that now will allow you to make such valuable contribution to my, and our, future. Apart from straightforward accolades of the conscientious path you've taken and a celebration today of the beautiful road ahead for all of you, there are some things special to this place that should be acknowledged today. You as students made the decision to undertake your studies and you, as staff, made the decision to teach in regional Australia. We know that on a global scale there is a move to the cities. We are fast approaching the moment when for the first time in the history of the entire world there will be more people living in cities than outside them. The fact of climate change is having a profound effect on the land and its continuing productivity.

But given all that, regional and remote Australia is not simply somehow about to vanish. Paradoxically Australia's economic health currently depends on the land or rather what lies beneath it. Without the mining of our natural resources in remote Australia this county's economy would be struggling. Without the landscapes, the wineries, the characters, the small still somehow innocent reminders of an earlier Australia which country towns retain, for Mildura and the likes of the Murray for instance, tourism would not exist. And so regional and remote Australia continues to play a vital role in our lives both practically and symbolically. Many of you today will receive your ticket of leave. The qualification conferred on you today will give many the opportunity to move away possibly to much bigger cities. That is as it should be. You need to widen your horizons, experience a different pace of life in our big urban hubs or overseas and go on to gain more skills and greater insights to carry you forward in your lives and careers. But I ask you today not to forget that it's been regional Australia that has equipped you, through this university, for your next exciting steps in life and I ask you to consider that one day if you go away you may return and in some large or small way give back to these communities which have nurtured you.

Some of you will be aware that I have spent a bit of time here over last the few years. Some people outside of Mildura wonder why. One look at my diary and schedule for the last seven weeks will show that I have been doing business in person over that short period in Canberra, Sydney, Melbourne Adelaide, London, Glasgow, Paris, Brussels, Osaka, Kyoto, Nowra and Honolulu and I got back last Sunday night. And the next few weeks include Canberra, Melbourne, Adelaide, Christchurch, Seoul and Wang Chu.

Why do I keep spending time in little old Mildura? Well I hope it's come to your attention that little old Mildura has a remarkable cultural landscape. My business lies in the arts and culture. I come here because Mildura has one of the best if not the best Writers Festivals in Australia and one of the most interesting visual arts festivals in the world. Palimpsest has been around for a long time and travelled the length and breadth of the Murray, as has the Murray River International Music Festival. The Mildura Jazz Food

and Wine Festival and Mildura Wentworth Arts Festivals are going from strength to strength.

These five festivals under the banner of Arts Mildura and set in an oasis of great food and good coffee and magnificent locations are truly remarkable in the remote and regional context. What you may not be aware of is that this university, YOUR university, has been a strong supporter of that activity and long may that support continue. Neither the Writers Festival or Palimpsest would exist without this university and the participants of its staff who also contribute through the hard working board of Arts Mildura.

La Trobe University sees the value in a continuing, lively cultural context in which its students and staff can play active roles and that kind of support and partnership is exactly what regional resilience is all about. No one goes it alone and survives out here.

My ongoing friendship and interaction with Arts Mildura has also afforded me two superb examples of locals who went away and came back again to give back to the community.

Helen Healy, who is the Director of Arts Mildura, came from Ouyen. She went away to learn and work and returned a few years ago to bring her skills to the agricultural landscape. Her efforts have seen Arts Mildura grow into a highly regarded suite of professionally run festivals which bring joy and pride to the people of this region. She's extended that realm to Broken Hill and to Mungo National Park and the excellent work with indigenous people who live here and visit here.

Kim Chalmers came from Euston, went to the Adelaide Conservatorium of Music and has returned to contribute to this community, both through her work in the family wine business and in music and the arts.

Both of these hard working and visionary women have homes in Mildura and offer all of you admirable examples of how to go away, learn, experience and bring back the well honed skills to make a significant contribution to regional Australia.

The stories I have heard and the art that has been made while I have been engaging with Mildura have made me only too aware of just how tough this town has been doing it for a long time. Yet despite tough times the magnificent Art Vault opened, the Mildura Art Centre acquires a grand piano, and inspiring projects both within and without the University continue to be planned.

The Happiness Register sees Mildura come out on top of all the river towns along the Murray and why? When irrigation quotas are cut, when people have to rethink the family business they thought they would continue forever, why is the community still happy with this place?

It's because of art and imagination, alive and well in this community, and it's because of individuals, companies and organisations, like this university, which is now your alma mater of which you today become distinguished alumni, supports that life of the imagination and in so doing brings vision and hope.

As you now envisage your futures, made so much more viable and now with so much more potential unleashed through your studies, I ask you to keep this University, this remote city, this region, in your active memory. Value what they've given you over the years and start imagining now how you will give back in the future. Congratulations graduates, your hard work are rewarded today and we celebrate your proud achievement.