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BOBBY GOLDSMITH FOUNDATION

ITA BUTTROSE AC OBE

INSTALLATION AS PATRON OF BGF

The Hon. Michael Kirby AC CMG

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ITA: DISTINGUISHED CITIZEN

My task on this occasion is to participate in the installation of Ita Buttrose as Patron of the Bobby Goldsmith Foundation (BGF). No one could deserve this appointment as richly as she does.

Ita's career, and public service, have been spectacular. In many ways it has coincided with mine. Her education was, like mine, in public schools. This is a great experiment inherited from colonial Australia that promised all children everywhere in Australia, education that was free, secular and compulsory. It is one of the fundamental building blocks put in place for

the new Commonwealth of Australia that began at the turn of the 19th century.

Ita's secondary education was at the Dover Heights High School. I imagine that this was the school later replaced by Vaucluse High School, a paragon of public education. It produced many talented and outstanding pupils until it was sold off to the private sector in 2006. This resulted in a serious decline in the availability of public education for the Eastern suburbs of Sydney. Who was the politician who took such a short-sighted decision? Sadly, politicians on both sides have, in recent decades have downgraded and underfunded support for public schools. Ita and I are proud alumni of Australian public education. It gave us the common touch.

Ita's work career had a modest start. She began employment at the age of 15 years as a "copy girl" in media empires. Her talents were quickly realised. Rapidly, she rose in the ranks of journalism, editorship and innovation in the media world. She became General Editor of the *Australian Women's Weekly*. In Ita's time this was a highly influential magazine with lovely photographs; thought provoking columns; and broad discussion of the place of women in the nation and the world.

Ita became a towering force in the Packer media stable. She was, in turn, Editor in Chief of the *Daily Telegraph* and the *Sunday Telegraph* newspapers (1981-84). She was the first woman to hold those highly influential positions. She was founding Editor of *Cleo*, an influential magazine that targeted the interests and concerns of young Australian women. Soon after, she became first female member of the Board of News Limited, Australia. Her eclectic media experience quickly graduated

to the new media of television. Over the years she participated in the *Sunrise* program for Chanel 7; *Beauty and the Beast* for Chanel 10; the *Today Show* for Chanel 9. The ultimate accolade was her appointment as Chair of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation in 2019.

Her engagement over many decades, in media responsibility and influence was the highest tribute to her, received from hard nosed proprietors who knew that Ita Buttrose was always a “safe pair of hands”.

ITA AND PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

Possibly because it was so astonishing to see such a well organised, creative and talented media person who was female, Ita quickly became much in demand in society for her hugely varied areas of community engagement. She became a member of boards of civil society organisations; president of many of them because her talent was recognized as invaluable; and she offered her contribution to publicity for many important public causes. Over the years these have included:

- * Mental health of Australians;
- * Aged and community welfare in Australia;
- * Bowel cancer;
- * The Sydney Symphony Orchestra;
- * Alzheimer’s disease in Australia;
- * Prostate cancer;
- * The Smith Family and the needy;
- * A Fund for nurses;
- * The challenges of older Australians;

- * The admirable work of Salvos;
- * Deaf and Blind Children;
- * Manufacturing in the area of arts and culture;
- * Macular disorder;
- * The challenge of arthritis; and
- * Generally serving as role model for women.

With me, she serves as Patron of the Animal Welfare League of Queensland. Big and small organisations sought her engagement.

HONOURING ITA

With such a brilliance in communicating sensible ideas and full targeted passion, it was natural that Ita should become recognised as a voice for the ordinary Australian family and citizens of every walk of life in this country. In recognition of Ita Buttrose's huge and unstinting contributions to the community she was recognized in many ways:

- * The award of the Honorary Degree of Doctor of Letters was conferred on her by Macquarie University;
- * The Honorary Degree of Doctor of Letters was also conferred on her by the University of Wollongong;
- * In 1979 she was appointed an Officer of the Order of the British Empire (OBE);
- * In 1988, she became an Officer of the Order of Australia (AO);
- * In 2019, she was elevated to Companion of the Order of Australia (AC), now the nation's highest honour;
- * She was appointed *Australian of the Year* in 2012; and

- * Her distinguished career was recognised by appointment to royal organisations established to honour Queen Elizabeth's Diamond Jubilee in 2012.

When the terrible pandemic of AIDS, caused by HIV, came to Australia in 1984, it was natural that the Hawke Government should look for someone who could express empathy and a love broad enough to reach the often isolated and denigrated sections of the community who were at risk of contracting HIV. Those of us who lived through those dark years will never forget the quiet, sane and inclusive contributions of Ita Buttrose:

- * From 1984 she served on the National Advisory Committee on AIDS (NACAIDS);
- * In 1991 she was elected Chair of the AIDS Trust of Australia;
- * In 2013 she was elected an honorary life member of the Bobby Goldsmith Foundation and took part in many events (some of them fundraisers) in support of this most worthy organisation over its 40 years of help for the needy, often isolated and unloved; and
- * In 2023 BGF now seeks to elevate life membership into the highest position as Patron of BGF.

ITA AS PATRON OF BGF

It is against this background of lengthy, dedicated, selfless and virtually always unpaid engagement with the Australian community, in so many of its aspects, that the appointment of Ita Buttrose as Patron comes naturally and unanimously.

The secret ingredient that Ita has added to many civil society organisations with which she has been associated qualities that can be summed up as a reflection of her "*Passionate Life*". She once wrote a book "*What is Love?*" A title borrowed from *Twelfth Night* by William Shakespeare. Her search for empathy with others has never wavered.

BGF has reached a watershed in its marvelous history. The AIDS pandemic is not over. But we have lived through the worst. Deep questions must be answered concerning the future outreach of BGF. It will reach out to the western suburbs of Sydney. But it will also reconsider deeply its role and function. There is no one better to serve as Patron at this time of change, than Ita Buttrose.

From the varied, enduring and distinguished engagement with the Australian community, it is little wonder that Ita's elevation to the rank of companion of the Order of Australia came with particular mention of her contributions as a role model. She has been a role model for women. But she has also been a role model for men. And for children throughout our nation. In short, Ita is iconic.

I therefore propose that, with acclamation and gratitude, we should install Ita Buttrose AC OBE as a Patron of the Bobby Goldsmith Foundation. In much of its 40 years of service and engagement with the disadvantaged and vulnerable, BGF has enjoyed the support of Ita Buttrose. Now she will be our Northern Star. Patron in Chief of Australia. And now by our acclamation, Patron of BGF by the decision and applause of this most worthy organization facing new challenges; and the confirmation of its long-standing service to the specially needy.

I give you Ita Buttrose, iconic Australian to be henceforth Patron of Bobby Goldsmith Foundation.

