



Inaugural Speeches

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Extract from NSW Legislative Assembly Hansard and Papers Thursday 13 November 2014.

Ms JODIE HARRISON (Charlestown) [11.51 a.m.] (Inaugural Speech): At the outset of this, my inaugural speech representing the good people of the electorate of Charlestown, I acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which I am standing—the Gadigal people of the Eora nation—and pay respect to their elders, both past and present, and to Aboriginal people in this place today. Acknowledgement of country is something that is right and proper to do in this, the oldest Parliament in this country. The Aboriginal people of Australia carry with them the oldest surviving culture in the world. Acknowledgement of country was made more meaningful for me when I sat with my father, Clive, 10 months before he died, as he watched television coverage—the day after eye surgery with a patch over one eye—as Prime Minister Kevin Rudd apologised for the removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families, their communities and their country.

The Prime Minister apologised for the pain, suffering and hurt endured by these children and their descendants and for their families left behind. Clive, a man of European heritage, had tears in his unpatched eye, and afterwards he recalled to me his childhood in primary school in Port Macquarie when he used to play with the local Aboriginal children. He recalled too that when he moved into high school he was told he had to wear shoes to school, and that he was no longer allowed to play or associate with those Aboriginal kids, and he took that advice. With a patch over one eye, Dad cried for the injustice in which he had played a part. He cried acknowledging the healing that the apology worked towards.

Clive Harrison had an incredible influence on me. Dad was a fitter and turner by trade, completed his apprenticeship with the Forestry Commission, was a professional singer for a while, and married my mother, Elizabeth Denning, in 1967 in Sydney. I was born in 1968, first lived in Smithfield and spent my formative years growing up in the south-western suburbs of Sydney. My brother, Todd, was born five years later. Dad was promoted through the sheet metal engineering company he worked for eventually to become the general manager of the firm, which provided sheet metal for such iconic buildings as Centrepoint, the Sydney Opera House and the High Court of Australia. He worked long hours, leaving home at 7.00 a.m. and arriving home often after 7.00 p.m. for dinner, which Mum had prepared. Mum worked largely part time, so that she could support Todd and me as we were going through school, and so she could keep the house together.

I remember lots of entertaining, Friday night card nights, and wonderful holidays caravanning throughout the eastern parts of Australia. Mum is still very much a solid rock in my family. I thank her for the support she gives without which I could not be in this place. When I was 11 years old, although our family was not religious in the traditional sense, I joined the Salvation Army, and was a member of the Salvos for the next five years. Yes, I learned to play the tambourine—or timbrel as we called it—but I was always jealous of the boys who got to play the horns in the brass band as we performed Christmas carols in the local streets for our neighbours.

More importantly, that was when my commitment to social justice was truly cemented in my being. While I still do not quite understand the Salvos's logic of collecting donations in licensed premises, the work that is done by non-government organisations [NGOs], faith-based and secular, in assisting people who are in need to get on top of their lives is something that is incredibly important. We live in a community, and it is incumbent on us to contribute to that community for the betterment of all its members, especially when some need a hand up. Government certainly has an essential role in looking after and building community, but community groups and NGOs are often ably placed to assist more quickly. I have certainly seen this over the past few months as I volunteered in one of the Samaritans Emergency Relief Centres, providing food for those with none, and assistance with paying bills for some people who were doing it very tough.

When I was only 19 years old I met my husband, Bruce Jones. Before meeting Bruce my life plan was, in this order: to get a degree and a good job, travel the world, marry in my late twenties, have two children and contribute to society. Meeting Bruce brought the marriage plan forward by several years and together we have managed to do the rest. In the early 1990s, after spending time with my parents who had bought a small business in Lake Macquarie, Bruce and I saw the light and moved to the Newcastle region. I think now we have been accepted into the Novocastrian club.

Bruce has always been supportive of my decision to enter public life, boosting my confidence in my ability to lead, represent and advocate for people. Bruce and our children, India and Phillip, are here today, along with my mum and her sister, Aunty Bev. I thank Bruce, India and Phillip for the love and support they have given me in choosing the path of representing the people of Charlestown. I would not and could not have entered public life without their support. I have probably developed my dad's passion for doing a good job, which meant hard work and long hours. Even though that was the case, I still have wonderful memories of holidays and relaxation time with mum, dad and Todd. I truly hope that, even though I may often be away from home throughout my time in Parliament—be it short or long—India and Phillip develop the kind of wonderful memories with our family that mum, dad and

Todd gave me.

I also hope that through my time in this place I give further weight to the argument that it is, in fact, just as acceptable for a woman to be in Parliament as it is a man. By the time I left school there had been only six female members in this place. Thankfully, since then those numbers have increased and I am now the fifty-seventh female member. I am the fifth member for Charlestown, following four men. I am also the first female Mayor of the City of Lake Macquarie, a position to which I was honoured to be elected in 2012. The City of Lake Macquarie has more than 200,000 residents and is one of the largest local government areas in this State. I acknowledge my fellow councillors: Brian Adamthwaite, Barney Langford, Rob Denton, Barry Johnston, Daniel Wallace, Ken Paxinos, Rosmairi Dawson, Wendy Harrison, Kay Fraser, Chad Griffith, Jason Pauling and Laurie Coghlan. I thank them for the work that I know they all do in representing their constituencies, working together in a respectful way, and for making decisions that are good not only for now but also, importantly, into the future.

I would also like to make mention of the General Manager of Lake Macquarie City Council, Brian Bell. I think—although I may be biased—that Brian is one of the best general managers, if not the best general manager, in local government in this State. I thank him and his creative and insightful team for their friendship and support as well as their fearless and frank advice. Back home, we are all excited about the International Children's Games being held in Lake Macquarie in 23 days, which will really show the rest of New South Wales, Australia and the world what a wonderful place we come from, and the warmth and generosity of our people. I recognise the role of the former mayor, the member for Lake Macquarie, Greg Piper, in winning the bid for Lake Macquarie to be the first city in the Southern Hemisphere to hold this prestigious event, which is endorsed by the International Olympic Committee.

I also recognise the incredible planning and work that has been underway for more than a year and a half and is happening right now at Lake Macquarie City Council to host the games, with 1,500 12- to 15-year-old athletes and their supporters coming from 80 cities in 30 countries right across the world. It is indeed exciting times for my home city. I am proud that the residents of Lake Macquarie voted for a council that plans not only for the here and now but also for future generations. Lake Macquarie City Council espouses the view that the late Hon. Edward Gough Whitlam stated so simply but so eloquently:

I plan for the ages, not just for this life.

I intend always to be cognisant and supportive of issues facing local government in this State. It was a Labor Government, after all, that introduced the Integrated Planning and Reporting Framework into New South Wales—an incredibly powerful tool for the health of local government in the long term. Having worked for a local council for 14 years and having been privileged to have served in an elected capacity for a further six years, I know how important local government is to the provision of services and facilities for local communities. I am proud to be elected as a Labor member of Parliament. Sixty-five years ago tomorrow Ben Chifley said:

The Labor Movement exists to promote social and economic security for the people, higher living standards, and the progressive expansion of Australia as a nation in the world community of nations.

It was Labor that introduced the age pension, electrified rural New South Wales, began construction of the Snowy Mountains Hydro Scheme and began construction of the Sydney Opera House. It was Labor that opened access to universities to all, made the historic decision to protect the New South Wales rainforests, floated the Australian dollar, created Medicare, passed the Sex Discrimination Act and introduced universal superannuation. It was Labor that passed the Native Title Act, doubled the size of New South Wales national parks in a period of eight years, built or rebuilt 72 hospitals in regional New South Wales over a period of 16 years, introduced the National Disability Insurance Scheme, provided New South Wales with its first female Premier, appointed the highly respected first female Governor in New South Wales, appointed the also highly respected first female Governor-General and provided Australia with its first female Prime Minister.

I want to thank all those Labor Party members, friends of Labor and personal supporters who supported my preselection back in July, and who assisted and volunteered in my by-election campaign. My eternal gratitude goes to the longstanding local Labor members who worked tirelessly to support me, and also to the wonderful Labor members from other electorates who joined us in Charlestown in the nine weeks right up until 25 October. We had thousands of very real conversations with Charlestown voters—conversations that showed Labor people are very much part of their communities, with a deep interest in issues that are of concern to their communities, as well as those issues that should be celebrated. I cannot name the hundreds of people who worked on the campaign, but I want in particular to thank the people who were absolutely central: Rose Jackson, Jesse Hancock and Declan Clausen. [*Extension of time agreed to.*]

I must say that I will not miss the 6.00 a.m. text messages, but I am sure there will be opportunity to do it all again next year. Thanks also to the local Hunter State and Federal members who provided me with sage advice and support: Sonia Homery, Clayton Barr, Jill Hall, Sharon Claydon and Pat Conroy. To my parliamentary leader John Robertson and deputy leader Linda Burney, I

extend my gratitude for the incredible work they both put in throughout the campaign. They both really need to get some more permanent accommodation in the Hunter to alleviate travel times.

I am excited to be able to be working with my Labor colleagues in Parliament to continue to do the great work that Labor does. The Labor Party is an intrinsic part of the labour movement in this country. Unions of working people are also intrinsic to the labour movement. I have been a union member all my working life. I have been a union delegate for several years and I worked for two unions prior to becoming mayor of Lake Macquarie: the United Services Union and United Voice. It is rather fitting that there is a union rally out the front of Parliament House at the moment. Good on the PSA! While with the United Services Union I negotiated working conditions with employers and represented members when they were experiencing difficulties at work.

The United Services Union provided me with an incredible opportunity when I was sent to the United States as part of an Australian Council of Trade Unions contingent to work with one of the major unions, the Service Employees International Union [SEIU]. I worked in Allentown and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, New York City and Washington DC. The model of collectivism and organising people who earn a wage that puts them under the poverty line was inspiring. The hope and passion that was imbued in these union members to improve their lives and the lives of those alongside them was astounding. I know that those experiences will be incredibly beneficial to me in representing the people of Charlestown.

United Voice is a union of some of the lowest paid workers in New South Wales. While working for United Voice I was given the opportunity to work with early childhood educators to inspire them to work collectively not only for better working conditions and pay for themselves but also, importantly, for a better, more stable early education for the young people they cared for every day. I thank the members and officials of United Voice for their passion in improving the lives of low-paid workers, some of whom live below the poverty line. I especially thank Mark Boyd who gave me the opportunity to work for such a progressive union and for being my quiet assistant on 25 October this year.

I cannot give this inaugural speech without making some reference to the reason for the by-election in which I was elected. It is through a very strange set of circumstances that I am here giving my inaugural speech when so many other members are giving their valedictories. The decisions made in this place should always be made by us for the overall benefit of the people we represent. We should always make decisions with that in mind but, more importantly, be seen to be making decisions with that in mind. The needs of our electorates must always be the primary focus of our decision-making here and of our everyday actions. I never want to move from what is in my heart—from a deep belief in, and observance of, what is right and what is ethical.

I truly hope that the values I hold deep within my core will always be there, and that they are not jaded by the politics of this place. I have asked my friends and the people I love to remind me to stay grounded. I know it will be up to me, along with every other elected member, to restore faith in politicians. As I have heard referred to in several valedictory speeches of colleagues over the past couple of weeks, we do indeed have in New South Wales an honourable profession of politics. Indira Gandhi said:

You cannot shake hands with a clenched fist.

I hope that my hands will always be open, and that my heart will always be strong. I thank the members of Parliament who have made me feel welcome, some of whom sit on the other side of this place. In particular, Dr Andrew McDonald has given valuable guidance on the nuances of this place. I also appreciate the work of the parliamentary staff that have been incredibly helpful over these past few weeks and no doubt will continue to be as I settle into the role. Finally, I thank the good people of Charlestown for their endorsement. From Adamstown to Eleebana, Dudley to Cardiff, Windale to Warners Bay, I intend to represent them well in an honest and hardworking manner. I am truly honoured to be their representative in Parliament. I intend to work hard to achieve good outcomes for them, and I will do my utmost to build their trust in me.