



Inaugural Speeches

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Extract from NSW Legislative Assembly Hansard and Papers Wednesday 28 May 2003.

Mrs HANCOCK (South Coast) [7.30 p.m.] (Inaugural Speech): Madam Acting-Speaker, fellow members, friends and family: May I first and foremost welcome and thank my friends and family from the South Coast who have travelled such a long way to be part of this auspicious occasion and to join us this evening in the gallery. You have indeed thrown caution to the wind by travelling along the underfunded, neglected and notorious section of the Princes Highway between Milton and Nowra. Your presence for me enhances this occasion, and your friendships have enriched my life.

I address this House as the last of the class of 2003, those 20 or so members from both sides of politics who were newly elected to this Parliament on 22 March. We all assembled here from distant and disparate electorates some weeks ago to undergo our two-day induction seminars: the new kids on the block who, like students beginning high school, were nervous, subdued, eager to learn, careful not to ask stupid questions, in fact careful not to ask any questions.

I think we all felt some sense of camaraderie despite our different political backgrounds, and many of us began friendships that would cross party lines. We learned about setting up offices, hiring staff, allowances, procedures, and this place. We lunched together, were photographed together, chatted together, dined together, and swapped stories about the areas we represent. We were united in ways that we had never imagined. But, sadly, we would all in this place become opponents in the gladiatorial game called democracy.

The first week in Parliament saddened me immensely. There we were, the class of 2003 who had come together in those first days united by our pride in our election success, our unswerving commitment to our electorates, and our enthusiasm, and in the knowledge that our lives henceforth would be forever changed. My sadness deepened as the realisation hit home that the things that inextricably united us in those first few days together would make way for the more ephemeral things that would forever divide us. We would be divided by our parties, by this table, and by the system which, by definition, pits party against party and requires us to partake in abusive dialogue, to speak when opponents are speaking and to hurl abuse across this table at each other. In the words of an unremarkable and entirely forgettable man, Kelvin Throop, "If people behaved like governments, you'd call the cops."

In that first week I felt I had made a wrong decision. I could not cope with the discordant sounds of our political institutions clanging against each other. Those bitter sounds of democracy at work dismayed and disturbed me. An overwhelming sense of isolation and loneliness hit me hard, but that was, in hindsight, part of a normal process of adjustment. I listened in awe and admiration to many of the inaugural speeches from the class of 2003. We had been given no particular guidelines for these addresses, except, perhaps, that we should not make personal or critical comments about individuals from opposing benches, nor should we use this opportunity to criticise the current Government. I quite early dismissed the notion of criticising the Government. After all, the severe time limitation of 20 minutes would be grossly inadequate for such a feat.

But the class of 2003 shone brightly in their first speeches here. From both sides we listened to the stories of our varying campaign experiences, the journeys that led us to this place, and the unbelievable lives of many that had culminated in this humbling experience. Virginia Judge spoke dramatically about her long-term quest to arrive here. Linda Burney spoke proudly about the people

she represents, and I shared her obvious joy in being the first indigenous person to be elected to the New South Wales Parliament. Who could forget Steve Cansdell, the artist on the canvas, or Gladys Berejiklian, the new member for Willoughby obsessed with a margin of 144 votes, who struck us all with her intelligent understanding of all things economic. I have found in Gladys, despite the differences in our ages, a friend and a person of shared beliefs.

Last week we heard from my friend Andrew Constance, the boy from Bega, who, like me, had experienced not only a bitter preselection but also an equally challenging campaign, overcoming the odds to be the youngest member of the class of 2003 and a man who will, I know, devote himself to the people of the Bega electorate. Then Greg Aplin exploded onto this stage with a brilliant inaugural address. He was followed by Steven Pringle, who stunned us all with his passionate and dramatic performance. The class of 2003 will make their mark in this Parliament and in this place. Tonight, as part of my inaugural address, I would like, in this limited time, to pay tribute to them all and express my wish that the sense of camaraderie that united us all in those first few days will in some way endure and unite us in our future quests.

Now it is my turn to tell my story. Shelley Hancock, the member for South Coast—it sounds good—described in the *Sydney Morning Herald* as the lone Liberal who pierced Labor's armour, an unlikely hero. My life compared to others has been singularly unremarkable. I grew up in Chatswood on Sydney's leafy North Shore. But my father and mother instilled in me that my address made me no better or worse than anyone else. They taught me to hate prejudice and intolerance, and above all else to value education. My dad had grown up in a working-class background in Maroubra, leaving school early to work in a bank to support his single mum and two sisters. He studied at night to gain his law degree, and entered the legal profession, where he remained until shortly before his death some 20 years ago. My mum also emerged from a working-class background in Carlisle, England. Mum and dad's relationship was one of those Hollywood-style wartime romances begun when dad was on leave from the RAAF during World War II.

My sister and I were the luckiest of children, growing up in the happiest of homes where our parents never fought. They loved each other deeply until they were parted by dad's death. Everything I am I owe to them, two wise and immensely clever people. I attended Chatswood Primary School and was selected to attend the OC class at Artarmon Primary School. Following this were six immensely rewarding years at North Sydney Girls High School, a selective high school then and now that instilled in its female students the belief that we can aspire to anything, and we did. I was a somewhat cheeky and overly garrulous student—surprise, surprise—with no particular ambitions. I stumbled into an Arts Degree at the University of Sydney because it seemed like a good idea at the time. I then stumbled into a teaching career, which also seemed like a good option at the time.

Surprisingly enough, teaching would be an immensely rewarding and enjoyable career for me. I seem to possess a natural affinity with students and an ability to pierce the often impenetrable exterior of that most feared group of people, adolescents. My experiences at Ulladulla High School provided me with joy, tears, and rewards beyond bounds. They are fantastic kids, and to this day the staff are devoted to them and to our community—a staff like so many others in schools throughout New South Wales, giving so much more than most people realise. Lorraine Robertson joins us tonight in the gallery. She is one of the best staff members and teachers I have ever known, and a

long-time colleague and friend. It is my commitment to the teachers of New South Wales that has in so many ways led me to this place. For them I will always be a strong voice and supporter.

Without doubt, though, my greatest achievements and the greatest joys of my life have been my three children. My son, David, now 24, possesses a wonderful, caring nature. My two beautiful feisty daughters, Kate and Rachel, are both currently studying at the University of Wollongong. Motherhood convinced me that mine is the privileged gender. Motherhood for me was happiness beyond bounds. I thank my great kids and my husband, Ossie, for their love and absolute acceptance of my recent aspirations to contest the seat of the South Coast and for their encouragement to do so.

While I could never have left my children when they were little to take on this challenge, I do so now, assured that they have almost broken free from my apron strings—something that saddens me more than it saddens them. Life for us will never be the same. The lives of my husband and my son, David, at home in Mollymook have already changed. In my absence they have taken on the intellectually challenging tasks of loading the washing machine, they have learnt to remember garbage nights and, to my absolute amazement, they do the shopping. In the first two weeks of Parliament I stocked the refrigerator with the usual meat, vegetables and fruit, et cetera, but after two days when the food had gone, David and Ossie decided to do the shopping—a new experience for them, which resulted in a fridge well stocked with several varieties of beer.

My campaign to win the seat of the South Coast from the Labor incumbent began some seven months ago. I was still teaching and in my fifteenth year as a councillor on Shoalhaven City Council, and I had not even contemplated the challenge of State politics. But for a number of reasons, I did—and of course the rest is history. I had lived in Milton since my marriage. My children were born in the Milton hospital and they are part of a fortunate group of children who grew up in the most beautiful electorate in this State, the South Coast. The electorate stretches from Nowra-Bombaderry in the north to Mollymook and Milton in the south, and encompasses some of the most breathtaking areas one could ever see, including perhaps the jewel in its crown—Jervis Bay. With undulating, seemingly evergreen rural landscapes, magnificent beaches with the whitest sands in the world, coastal villages and towns each with its own character as well as charm and history, we have it all.

The South Coast electorate is entirely within the local government area of Shoalhaven City and also entirely within the Federal electorate of Gilmore. The overwhelming natural beauty of this area attracts thousands of tourists each year. We gladly share our rivers, lakes, beaches, attractions, walking trails, festivals, with the visitors. Of course, tourism is the lifeblood industry of the South Coast. However, we also have myriad other successful businesses and industries, large and small, which continue to grow and prosper. Development pressure in this electorate will continue to be an issue for all of us, and getting the balance right between the need to grow and the protection of our environment remains the great challenge in this area for leaders of all tiers of government.

So far we have done well. But it is the people of the South Coast who make it the place I doubt that I shall ever leave. They are people who have moved there to retire, or who were born there, or who have made it their workplace, or who have come to join the numbers of defence forces personnel who are stationed at HMAS *Albatross* and HMAS *Creswell*. Nowra, the largest town in the electorate, is often referred to as a defence town. Joanna Gash and I are proud of that title and of the young men and women of the defence forces.

The people of the South Coast are not particularly well off, but they devote themselves to helping those who are less well off. A list of our voluntary associations would be too long to mention here, but every day our volunteers are either fighting fires, undertaking marine rescues, helping in emergency incidents, delivering meals to others, raising funds for facilities that governments will not provide, and sitting by the bedside of people who are sick or dying. Our people and our citizens are simply the best. I am so humbled and so proud to represent them. I met many of them while doorknocking during those interminable and insufferably hot days last summer. [*Extension of time agreed to.*]

Patricia White, my friend and campaign secretary, joined me every day throughout the whole campaign. We had some laughs and some tears, and it was Patricia who so often kept me going. She joins us this evening. I thank her very much for her companionship, her advice and her help. She is one in a million. Patricia will be elected as a councillor of the Shoalhaven City Council in March next year. She will take my place—just mark my words. Another lady who is truly one in a million and who is here as a surprise for me tonight is Joanna Gash. She is simply one of the best people I know. She has set the bar at an almost unattainable height for all of us who wish to truly represent our people in the best way possible.

Jo also joined me on the doorknocking trail on a hideously hot day just before Christmas. When we met up after a couple of hours of doorknocking torture, Jo was breathless, red-faced and obviously ill. I remember praying very hard that day, "Oh please God, don't take her now. Her supporters will string me up somewhere! Please God, don't take her now. She will only cause you trouble up there." But she bounced back and was ready for action shortly after. That is Jo Gash: She never stops, and just keeping up with her will be the greatest of all my future challenges. Joining me also to meet and greet the people of the South Coast were Jillian Skinner, Michael Gallacher, Michael Richardson, Patricia Forsythe, Peter Debnam, Senator John Tierney, John Turner, Lexie Meyer, Brad Hazzard, Chris Hartcher, George Souris, Don Harwin, the Women's Council members, the shadow Cabinet, the tireless Young Liberals and, of course, John Brogden and his beautiful wife, Lucy.

I thank very much all of them and the polling workers, the booth workers—everyone—for their immeasurable contributions to my campaign. I had the very, very best people working to wrest the seat back from Labor, including David Smith, my campaign manager who joins us this evening. I thank him as well as David Gray, Bruce Davis, Carl St Leon, who is one of the cleverest young men I have ever met, and of course Gareth Ward, who taught me a great deal about this system and this place. There is not much that Gareth does not know about politics, or any other subject for that matter—according to him, at least. I thank also Faye Lawrence, Margaret Hoschke, Josi Young, Sandy Smith, Noeline Melville, Helene Murphy, Jan Natt and Mary Reeves, who all made me believe that I could do this, which meant so much to me. I thank also everybody who worked so hard on my behalf. This has been the sweetest of victories. I offer my thanks to all of them and those I could not have named. We did it! We won! Against the odds, we won!

In conclusion, there are three men to whom most particularly I attribute this glorious victory—three exceptional men, without whose inspiration and motivation I would most certainly not be standing here tonight. For the benefit of those who apparently read inaugural addresses after members of Parliament die, they will need to know, if they are reading this after I am in the grave, that these men were my heroes: John Brogden, Don Harwin and Frank Cowling, my dad. I saw John Brogden for

the first time on television shortly after he was elected as the New South Wales Liberal Party Leader in March last year. My husband, Ossie, and I were simply struck with his remarkable eloquence, charisma and warmth—as well as his good looks, of course. He is a remarkable man who possesses a triple-X factor—a man who relates to people, to whom people instantly warm and to whom people are instantly drawn. John drew me to the New South Wales Liberal Party. Over the next four years he will continue to draw others. And he will sweep away the old and the arrogant, just wait and see.

I have said much about Don Harwin and tonight I must say more. I know that I would not have won the seat without him. He is an incredibly intelligent and sensitive man whose friendship I will always value. I learnt so much from him. The Liberal Party should treasure him for his commitment to all of us and for his unbelievable knowledge of all things political. I have spoken before of the tragedy of there being only one Don Harwin—but then he is one of a kind. I thank him for putting up with me and for guiding my campaign to victory. He is simply the best.

Finally my thoughts are with my dad, who is not here tonight. He passed away 20 years ago and, sadly, did not see his grandchildren grow up, nor could he share in this special night. But there would have been no prouder person watching from the gallery this evening. Maybe from some higher place he is looking down. My dad was not only the greatest man I have ever known, but also the man who somewhere throughout my life must have planted the Liberal seed. He worshipped at the altar of Sir Robert Menzies and could quote him verbatim—which bored my sister and me on most occasions. Dad and I argued very little, except perhaps about trade unionism.

But in our home, one did not mention the Labor Party, except in quiet, derogatory terms. The saddest I ever saw my Dad was the day when Bob Hawke was first elected to power. He just said very quietly to my mother, "Well, Betty, that's the end of the country", to which Mum, in her usual comforting way, replied, "Come on, Frank, it can't be that bad." He replied, and he was never rude to Mum, "Betty, don't talk nonsense." If Dad is watching, I want to say to him, "Dad, I am now a member of the Liberal Party that you loved so much and the State MP for the South Coast. Ain't that something! I will do my very best in this new role, as you always taught me to do, and I will do that in your memory." I thank everyone.

Madam ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Andrews): I congratulate the honourable member for South Coast on her inaugural speech and welcome her as member of the class of 2003.