

BOBBY GOLDSMITH FOUNDATION

ITA BUTTROSE AC OBE

INSTALLATION AS PATRON OF BGF

23 JUNE 2023 SYDNEY

The Hon. Michael Kirby AC CMG

Patron of BGF

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CAPTION: Ita with Michael and BGF CEO Nick Lawson

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 its time has overlapped my own. 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 on 1901.

Ita's secondary education was at the Dover Heights Home Science High School, now known as Rose Bay Secondary College. This helped to fill the gap created by the abolition of Vaucluse High School, a paragon of public education. These public schools have produced many talented and outstanding pupils. Vaucluse High School was sold off to the private sector in 2006. This resulted in a serious gap in the availability of public education for the Eastern suburbs of Sydney. Who was the politician who took these short-sighted decisions? Sadly, politicians on both sides have, in recent decades under-supported and underfunded 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 the youngest ever 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 medium stable. She was, in turn, the first woman to ever edit a major metropolitan newspaper in Australia as Editor-in-Chief of the *Daily Telegraph* and the *Sunday Telegraph* newspapers (1981-84). 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 and *Studio 10* for the Ten Network. The ultimate accolade was her appointment as Chair of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation in 2019. The only major network she has mused has been the Special Broadcasting Service (SBS). However, as she points out: "There's still time".

Her engagement over many decades, in media responsibility and influence was the highest tribute to her talents, 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 civil 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 recognised as invaluable; and she offered her contributions 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 (now Dementia) Australia;
- * Prostate cancer;
- * Osteoporosis;
- * The Smith Family and the needy;

- * The Australian Service Nurses' National Memorial fund;
- * The challenges of older Australians;
- * The work of the Salvos;
- * Deaf and Blind Children;
- * Manufacturing in the area of arts and culture;
- * Macular Disease Foundation;
- * The challenges of arthritis; and
- * 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 has been recognised in many ways:

- * In 1979 she was appointed an Officer of the Order of the British Empire (OBE) for her services to journalism, and a Centenary Medal for business leadership;
- * In 1988, she became an Officer of the Order of Australia (AO) for her services to the community, especially in the field of public health education, when she spearheaded Australia's HIV/AIDS Education Program;
- * In 2019, she was elevated to Companion of the Order of Australia (AC), the nation's highest honour for her service to the community

through leadership in the media, the arts, the health sector and as a role model.

- * Her distinguished career was recognised by appointment to several royal organisations, established to honour Queen Elizabeth's Diamond Jubilee in 2012;
- * She was chosen as *Australian of the Year* in 2013;
- * In 2014 Sydney's Macquarie University conferred an Honorary Doctor of Letters on Ita to recognise her contribution to the arts;
- * In 2014 Ita was the Inaugural NSW Excellence in Women's Leadership award winner;
- * In 2015 she was conferred an Honorary Doctor of Letters by the University of Wollongong for her contribution to mental health and ageing.
- * Ita was inducted into the Australian Media Hall of Fame in 2017;
- * In 2018, she was conferred with the University of New South Wales' highest honour - an honorary doctorate in medicine in recognition of her eminent service to health, being an inspirational role model for aspiring women in business and making a difference in society.

When the terrible pandemic of AIDS, caused by the human immunodeficiency virus (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 HIV positive or 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 elevates her 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 Co-Patron of BGF 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 and compassion in others has never wavered.

BGF has reached a watershed in its marvellous history. The AIDS pandemic is not over. But we have lived through the worst. Deep questions must now be answered concerning the future outreach of BGF. It will reach the western suburbs of Sydney. But it will also reconsider seriously 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 highest 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 Co-Patron: Patron of BGF by the decision and applause of this most worthy organisation facing new challenges; and by the confirmation of its long-standing service to the specially needy.

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

