

Occasional Address Graduation Speech,

Ceremony 7, 5:00pm, Tuesday 16th April

Ros Moriarty, Managing Director, The Jumbana Group

Deputy Chancellor Glen Sanford, Academic Staff, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen, and in particular, today's graduands of the University of Western Sydney. It is a privilege to be part of your ceremony today. Thank you warmly for inviting me.

Congratulations to the graduands, to each of you, on one of the most significant milestones of your life. You are today graduating with a world-class tertiary education from one of Australia's finest institutions, the University of Western Sydney.

For some of you, this will have been a more circuitous route than for others. Perhaps you have studied part time, and held down a job or jobs. Maybe you have taken time off midstream to travel, or you have negotiated the obstacles of failed courses or illness. Or for the brilliant, or lucky few, for you it has been a direct and exhilarating climb to academic distinction.

The magic of graduation day, is that no matter how you got here, you have all arrived at the same place. The beginning of the first, or a new, chapter of your professional lives. Whether yours is an undergraduate or postgraduate degree today, your time at this University has equipped you with a new set of analytical, organisational, interpretive and technical skills. As importantly, you have gained a whole raft of personal skills through the life challenges you have risen to, during this part of your educational journey. From the times when you felt invincible, to those when you were daunted, worried, or stressed. You have created equity in yourself – today is a celebration of your potential : you have the tools a great education gives you to back yourself, to be confident in the value you offer the world.

My own graduation more than thirty years ago is a day I remember more than most other milestones in my life. What I wore – home made and of dubious fashion currency because I was in a perpetual state of financial ruin while studying. It was a navy and red floral skirt, a stretchy navy long sleeve top, and a twisted bright red scarf. Who came – it was a new experience for my parents who are beaming in the photos – none of their immediate family, nor my siblings had ever gone to university. But mostly I remember how I felt on graduation day

– the butterflies in my stomach not to trip on the stairs, and a bubbling anticipation that a new uncharted chapter of my life lay ahead.

If only I had known just how uncharted my journey would be. I majored in French and Linguistics. You would be right in thinking this is an odd degree for a career in design. In fact I wanted to be a journalist and made the cadet shortlist for the Sydney Morning Herald. However the graduate they chose that year was not me. My first real job was one I very nearly didn't take. A research officer position at the Department of Aboriginal Affairs in Canberra. Totally unexpectedly it changed my life, opened my mind to a new dimension of being Australian, and was the foundation on which the jigsaw of my personal and professional future would fit together.

On my first day in the job, I met my future husband, an Aboriginal man, John Moriarty, with whom I would share a career, three children and a design adventure, which has taken us across Australia and to the far corners of the globe. Beginning with paper and paints on the kitchen table, our best-known commissions are Balarinji artworks covering Qantas aircraft, and uniforms for Qantas staff, and this year we clock up three decades of building a multi-disciplinary design practice. But today I would like to focus on a different project, and share some gentle insights from a group of wise women in the far north of the Australian bush.

I was generously given a place to belong in John's community of Borroloola in the Gulf of Carpentaria, when I first visited as a twenty one year old in the late 1970s. In all the years since, of being part of John's Yanyuwa family, I have been lucky to experience the grace and generosity of exceptional people. In 2006 I had the chance to take an unusual road trip to the Tanami Desert with thirteen matriarchs from John's tribe : my mothers-in-law, sisters, aunties and cousins. It was a week of women's Law ceremonies, where we camped out, painted up, and enjoyed the stillness of "listening to country" – as the Yanyuwa say, *Anyngkarrinjarra ki-awarawu* : listening in a quiet place lets you see.

When I am still, and the quiet washes over my spirit, then I can hear. When I find a calm place in my mind, I can see where to go.

The book that resulted from the trip, called *Listening to Country*, was another of those uncharted twists and turns in my career. There was nothing earlier in my working life to suggest I might have the opportunity to write, something I am hugely grateful for. It was also the genesis of our not-for-profit company The Nangala Project, and Indi Kindi, a pre-literacy project for very young Aboriginal children and their families in remote Australia. The spine of *Listening to Country* is a series of philosophy pieces about the big issues of life, regardless of race and

place. Let me share some of those thoughts from the Law women of my family in Borrooloola.

On belonging

narnu-yuwa

You belong to a place in the minds of your ancestors

My life fulfils the imagination of the generations who came before me, and whose spirit I carry forward. They prepared a special place for me, through their hope, dreams and love. I will always have that belonging.

On giving

ngulhu

Generosity and understanding my obligation are the same Generosity is a given : it is not a special thing, it is only what is expected of me

On meaning

ngalki

My inner spirit is my substance in the world

My inner spirit holds the unique beauty and meaning of my being. It is the essence of who I am in the world.

On love

kina palirra

Thank you, you are there.

I love you as you are. You are there. It is enough.

On truth

lhaanjima

Beauty is when I am straight with my integrity

Truth is a tranquil pool in my soul. When I keep my integrity, that's when I know the inner beauty of my spirit.

On compassion
ngarramilmila

My chest is warm when I have compassion

When I have compassion for you, my heart feels good. When I show you my emotion I know the warmth of being brave.

On truth
lhaanjima

Beauty is when I am straight with my integrity

Truth is a tranquil pool in my soul. When I keep my integrity, that's when I know the inner beauty of my spirit.

And perhaps my favourite,

On family
li-malarnngu

My family is the country of my soul

My family is the song of my life. It leads me across the landscape of my destiny.

Today, you have all joined the family of University of Western Sydney alumni, and this university has become part of your family. To each of you, along with everyone supporting you here today, you have my warmest wishes for all you dream of for the future. I wish you well in finding your own unique pathways to careers that are not just personally fulfilling, but which give you the opportunity to make your own special mark in the world, and contribute to it. I suspect most of you cannot even yet imagine what that will be.

To you, your teachers, family and friends so proud of you here today, have a wonderful celebration, and enjoy the well-deserved recognition of this significant achievement in your education, and in your life.