

# **UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA GRADUATION CEREMONY**

**Monday 20 December – 10.15 for 10.30am**

**Adelaide Festival Centre**

**Anne Howe – Chief Executive, SA Water**

Thank you for this opportunity to speak to you as you come together to celebrate your achievements.

This is an exciting beginning for you as you embark on your journey as a University of South Australia graduate.

This event marks an end for me. Last Friday I celebrated my retirement from the South Australian Public Service after thirty five years – the last ten as Chief Executive of SA Water.

Like many of you, I came to Australia from another country.

This wasn't my choice. I was nine years old. My parents made the life changing decision to migrate to Australia. It was a very cold winter in post-war England. My mother and father had lived through the Great Depression. My father had spent five years serving in the air force

during the Second World War and they were looking for a better, sunnier life for themselves, my brother and me.

These were fateful decisions, made to chase opportunities in a new land. The kind of decisions that you and your families have made in supporting you to get your degree in a very different place to the one you were used to.

It takes courage to take that step. It takes faith that you will find the personal resources to meet the challenges of coping with home-sickness, new people and new ways of doing things.

As a nine year old in 1959, I thought nothing of it. After months on an ocean liner my family disembarked in Sydney. Not exactly refugees, but nonetheless it felt like it to my mother when we were put on a bus and driven to an old army camp. A place in the middle of the bush where people spoke Australian and we spoke Yorkshire. It was all very strange.

Now, fifty years later, I look back at that single, brave decision by my parents to leave everything familiar behind. Geography changed my fate, and the choices I made along the way have led me to here.

For me, the move to Australia was truly a move to the Lucky Country. Despite failing at school, at fifteen years of age and without qualifications, I set out to work. Jobs were plentiful. It was the swinging 60's and with a sense of freedom and a belief that anything was possible, I ran headlong into the future. That future was travel, marrying a musician, having a baby, and moving to Adelaide in 1974.

The 1970's was an exciting time. The politics were all about social reform, anti-discrimination, industrial democracy, multiculturalism, and women's rights.

In South Australia, the Premier of this State, Don Dunstan, was shaking up the public servants and modernising the public service. He had a feisty bunch of feminists who were determined to see women get an opportunity to shine.

I didn't know it then, but that moment in time opened up opportunities for me undreamed of by my family. I just needed a job. Oscar Wilde once said "*It is better to have a permanent income than to be fascinating*".

We needed a steady income. Reform was in the air and social reformers were looking to change the way young people who were in

trouble were managed. I stumbled into a job that suited my way of doing things and began my career in the Welfare Department.

With much encouragement, I was sent to study Social Work at the South Australian Institute of Technology (now the University of South Australia). I never did get that degree. With a child, a husband who travelled, and promotion to jobs that became more and more demanding, I left with an Associate Diploma. I remember that time fondly as a time where discipline and structure was brought to my thinking, and big ideas were there to fuel a desire to change things for the better.

So my parents' bravery, people I met who wanted to make the world a better place and who believed in me, has led to what I now see as an extraordinary turn of events and a fortunate life.

As I move out of work and look forward to retirement, I am able to reflect on those life circumstances that shaped my fate. Those circumstances and the choices others and I made took me from Welfare to Water, and brought me to this stage today celebrating the beginning of your journey.

Of course you have a different world to explore. I wrote letters to my English relatives – they went first by ship and later by air. You have technology to connect you with the world in the blink of an eye. To me this is remarkable and mysterious. To you it's simply the way it is.

So, what can I say to you at this point in your life besides – you are the future, but future events will also shape you.

Along the way you will make decisions and choices – about your career, about family, about what's important to you. But if I've learnt anything from my own life, it's that forks in the road almost never lead to absolutely right or wrong outcomes, just different ones.

So don't hesitate to make those choices. Embrace the opportunities that lie ahead and know that – sooner than you ever imagined – you too will be looking back over your career.

My sincere wish is that you will be able to look back with pride and satisfaction on a life well lived.

Good luck and thank you.