

# VICTORIA UNIVERSITY

## HONORARY DOCTORATE – CHRISTINA INGLIS

7 December 2023

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E ngā mana e ngā reo, tēnā koutou; kua huihui mai nei; mo tēnei kaupapa whakahirahira.

*Esteemed guests from all walks of life, greetings to you all who have gathered here for this auspicious occasion.*

Congratulations to those who are graduating today - it is a wonderful achievement which will, at times, have felt like an endurance test, including for those who helped you get here.

It seems like a very long time ago that the Vice Chancellor rang me. His first words were “I think you know why I’m calling.” To be absolutely honest I thought he must be ringing for a donation – had the University’s finances sunk so low, I wondered, that the Vice Chancellor was resorting to cold-call fundraising?

Thankfully the Vice Chancellor was not on a mission to extract money, and the telephone call turned out to be much more welcome – although an immense surprise.

It is a huge honour to receive this doctorate from a University that holds such significance for my family – my husband Peter and I both completed our law degrees here.

Our four children (Ben, Luke, Mia and Indie) have or are studying here; our daughter-in-law and son-in-law studied here; and my sisters and brother studied here too.

It was here at the University that my parents met, somewhat romantically in an undergraduate French class. My father became professor of law at the University

and taught with luminaries such as Sir Kenneth Keith. It is at Victoria University where my father gained a doctorate for his work in family law.

And it is his doctoral robes that I am wearing for this occasion, found (after much frenetic searching) in a crumpled ball at the bottom of the dressing up box.

The sort of luminaries my father taught with have, of course, been replaced with successive generations of luminaries – including those who taught me, and who have guided our children through. This presents me with an excellent opportunity to sincerely thank those staff for their efforts, particularly their inspirational guidance, genuine interest and compassionate pastoral care shown to our children which, as parents, we have very much appreciated.

I have heard a rumour that academic law staff performance is measured, at least in part, on the number of times their writings get a mention in a Court judgment.

That is not, of course, the reason why the musings of one of this University's current luminaries, Professor Gordon Anderson, are cited in many of my judgments and papers (although I do sincerely hope that they have fed into an enormous Christmas bonus for him this year).

These sorts of academic musings are of particular significance in an area such as employment law which is dynamic, tends to be buffeted by the winds of political and legislative change, and which revolves around relationships, an inherent imbalance of power, and mutual obligations, rights and liabilities which often sit uncomfortably together, grating up against each other.

The thinking, explaining why things are not as straightforward as some might suggest, identifying the underlying principles and values to illuminate the way in which the law might develop going forward, is invaluable – not just to judges like me, but more generally to the many millions of workers and employers in Aotearoa NZ who live their lives under the shadow of the law.

So thank you Professor Anderson.

There is however one thing I am most definitely not going to thank Professor Anderson for, and that is setting such a ridiculous exam question all those years ago which robbed me – literally robbed me – of the stunning mark I would otherwise have received for his employment law class.

I would like to also thank the unnamed people who supported my honorary doctorate. I asked Gordon for details and he was very secretive, simply saying in a covert sort of way that a “cabal” had been involved.

I have since looked up the word cabal in the dictionary to see if it might cast any light on the identity mystery – the definition?

“a secret faction of dissidents united in a plot”

My thanks to the dissidents.

If I could pass on two pieces of advice to those who have graduated today.

Be true to yourself; do not try to emulate anyone else.

Be clear about what your foundational principles are - there will be many difficult hurdles along the way and forks in the road.

Returning to your foundational principles at times like that is the surest way to navigate the inevitable challenges, and the surest way to find success in its many varied forms.

And find (and then tightly hold onto) the selfless cheerleader in your life – I have been blessed with a husband, Peter, and a sister, Belinda, who have relentlessly carried out that role over the years.

I have also been blessed with four equally intelligent but individually idiosyncratic children – who not infrequently make my day job look like a complete doddle.

But I am grateful to my cabal of dissident children for continuing to stretch my mind, often in uncomfortable, sometimes confronting, ways. I can sincerely say

that they have made me a much better Judge. So I wish to publicly thank Indie, Mia, Luke and Ben.

Finally, I wish to acknowledge the O G cheerleader in my life, my mother.

She was an exceptionally clever woman, who completed her masters at Victoria University, and studied at the Sorbonne in Paris. She, like many other women at that time, stopped paid work when she married my father and started her life of unpaid work, which she continued to her death.

While my father received a doctorate, my mother (at least to my mind) equally deserved one for the non-judgmental, thinking contribution she unwaveringly made to the society she lived in. She set the bar high for those who followed in her wake.

And so I wish to dedicate my doctorate to my late mother, Susan.

Nō reira; tēnā koutou katoa