

ADDRESS TO HOBART MUMS NETWORK

BY MRS FRANCES UNDERWOOD

At the Launch of the cookbook *Inspired Cooking*

Fullers Bookshop Hobart Thursday 18 April 2013

As a mother, a grandmother, a teacher and as the wife of the Governor of Tasmania I extend the warmest congratulations to production manager Penni Lamprey and the Hobart Mums Network on this excellent production, *Inspired Cooking*. There are many references in the book to collaboration and team work and I imagine that along the way many friendships were made during your sterling efforts to produce *Inspired Cooking* as a means of raising funds for the Network, and the Hobart City Mission's Small Steps Program to assist mothers at risk.

It is not only the cooking, however, that is inspired about this exercise. The mere existence of the Hobart Mums Network is an inspiration. When a problem crops up how often do you hear "they should do something about it" although who the 'they' is, is never specified. How often do people wait passively "for the cavalry to arrive¹" to solve their problems? We seem to specialise in that approach in Tasmania, instead of grasping the nettle ourselves and finding a creative solution to fix the problem that is affecting our lives? Well the Hobart Mums Network is a shining example of creative, collaborative and effective problem solving. The can do attitude is inspiring; the inclusiveness; the willingness to have a go at something new; take a risk; promote Tasmanian products and healthy eating, and provide a

¹ Ellyard, Peter *Designing 2050* produced by The Podcast Network 2008

practical useful recipe book. And wasn't that a lovely photo in the paper today!

Being a mother is a monumentally important job. It can be intensely rewarding. It can be tough too, at times heart wrenching. Mothers and their babies hold a very special place in my heart. Some of the most rewarding work in my professional career has been with mothers and children. I was a mature age student and mother of three when I trained as an early childhood educator, started my career as a kindergarten teacher and had my fourth child. I ended up as Head of Friends' Junior School, but after my retirement, I returned to my first love, and until two years ago I taught Parent/Child classes in music for 0 – 4 year olds. But before all that, I *was a young* mum, married at 19, with three children under three, at the age of 22. I was fortunate. I had a good husband, the support of my mother and my mother in law, something many young mothers don't have. Each new baby was welcomed to the family with joy, expectations, hope and unconditional love. But it was *me* who felt that the overwhelming responsibility for these tiny lives was on my shoulders alone. It was *me* who felt riddled with self-imposed guilt, mothers' guilt when the unconditional love was strained by sheer exhaustion. Feeling you are on your own mentally, if not physically, achingly tired, you try your best to give your young ones; sustenance, love, security, a sense of belonging and identity when you yourself are wondering who *you* are in this rearrangement of relationships and your partner likewise. Suddenly the decisions are not about you, but about what is best for your child. Society is often quick to judge, when what is really needed is bucket loads of empathy. Somehow you feel not quite adequate as a mother.

In fact, this is all quite normal, but nothing can prepare you for it because each child is different, each mother is different and each circumstance different. If it was challenging for me nearly 50 years ago, with all support systems operating, how challenging must it be, in the uncompromising frantic pace of the global community of the 21st century, especially for those who are isolated from extended family or find themselves entirely on their own. They can lose faith in themselves when confronted with ‘*super nanny*’ telling them that there is only one way, her way. How undermining of that wonderful instinct called mothers intuition! Don’t ever forget; *you know your child better than anyone else*. Although Facebook is not the same as a person who is able to put themselves in your shoes, know how you are feeling and care about it; a person who is willing to listen attentively to you without judgement, offer support and be there with a cup of tea or an arm around your shoulder; but facebook can connect people. I could have done with the Mums Network all those years ago.

As Cicero said in 50 BC “There is nothing so like anything else as we are to one another, kindness generosity, goodness, justice are the deepest ties holding the human community together”² Nothing has changed since Cicero. As Stephanie Dowrick puts it in 21st Century “We are all walking in each other’s footsteps, standing on each other’s shoulders, learning from each other’s brilliance, and suffering from each other’s griefs. It is sobering and comforting to reflect on how inevitably we are part of a single human family”³.

² AC Grayling *The Meaning of Things* Pub Orion Books 2002

³ Dowrick, Stephanie *Daily Acts of Love* Pub Penguin Group 1998

When all is said and done how we treat each other, especially the most vulnerable in our society, is the key to success in life. To take people seriously and value them as individuals, nourishes their sense of identity and self-worth. What has changed, since 50 BC though, is the invention of technology that can put people in touch with one another. And this is what Hobart Mums Network does. It began as a face book group, a way for new mums to ask each other questions about everyday problems. Pursuing the aim of supporting, encouraging and inspiring its community of mums the Network grew into a tangible entity; and might I add, if this book is anything to go by, it grew in a most collaborative, creative, stylish and practical way, *The Haven* just one example, *Inspired Cooking* another. Personally I'm looking forward to making the pear and walnut salad! There is no doubting the hard work that would have gone into this project but I'm sure that the rewards of collaborative labour were great and the baby delivered won't disappoint. After all it comes from good stock; complied by Mums for Mums. Today is a day to celebrate your wonderful achievements and of course the birth of "*Inspired Cooking*" as you launch it into the world to reap well deserved rewards. Again warmest congratulations to everyone involved.

Thank You.