

Derby and Derbyshire Inspirational Women of the Year Award 2017

Disclaimer: If I stereotype and make assumptions tonight it is with reason because inequality, unfairness and questionable practice exists in our society today.

My given topic - Women and Leadership and why our history is so important?

Answer: Because our history tells us how we got here ...

Sonya, you have an inspiring Leader's Voice.

The women recognized for their voices tonight, our sisters and brothers here tonight I am an international woman.

With my topic in mind let me start by looking back over the past 100 years.

Let us remember the women who went to prison because they stood up against the cruel actions of men; the women who put up with being force-fed like the French make duck liver pate! ... These women would not succumb.

We owe our gratitude to the many women of all ages who took to the streets believing in fairness and the vote as a basic women right. History reflects women tirelessly campaigning to raise awareness to create a better future for us all. However the work is not yet finished!

History tells us many inspirational women leaders have stood strong with integrity and great vision. Their visionary efforts have been founded on loyalty to women for progress in society and for the good of all. This is what brings us together tonight.

Looking back we can see that what motivated these women to stand up for sisterhood is why our history is so important to each of us personally. It is their convictions and commitment that paves the way for us today.

Let us remember the women in the Land Army and who during both World Wars stood by men, nursed the casualties and took risks under cover and at the front.

Closer to home we must not forget the Derby women who kept the planes in the air by taking jobs at Rolls Royce when the men went to war. On return from duty it was the married women who gave up their jobs for men to return to work having been told they did not have a place at work because at the time the common belief was that their role was in the home.

Neither must we forget the women who were fortunate enough to have their husbands return from duty unscathed and were led to believe they were giving up their jobs because they would be provided for financially by husbands returning to work. Many of you present here tonight will have or have had past family members tell their stories about similar experiences.

Question: So why do I tell these stories?

Answer: Because I too have benefited from the work of these strong women. As a successful woman of international origins in my own right I celebrate women in leadership and the power of international women's voices with you tonight.

As a mature student age 40 I began what I call a process of re-education.

17 years later I am still at it and the outcome so far shows me that I have Voice.

However looking back I can see the right to education has offered me a great deal of opportunities and presents me many choices. Today I am privileged to be sharing this moment with you.

With hindsight, like many women I too have had to make tough life decisions and to learn to lead myself. To be educated and to find my Voice I also needed to make sacrifices. At times, I did two jobs to survive however I have had the *privilege* of working towards my adult life stage.

Besides, I can now also see it is all these remarkable women in history that have led me to learning about many things including how my own history has been important in shaping my Leadership Voice. They have taught me that to inspire self-leadership in others I need to be inspired myself first! I have learnt that to be in this 'place' within myself I also need to have a sense of knowing who I am.

I have recently learnt a great lesson in life: ☺

I have very recently returned from a trip to the Southern hemisphere to celebrate my mother's life. Family members and friends wrote snippets of how they remembered her and these were used to compile her eulogy. It was clear a theme emerging from HER story was how much she taught people probably without realizing it. She was a quiet reflective thinker with gentle ways.

When I listened about her and to the thoughts written by people who knew her, those whose lives she touched, HER story is about respect, the *love* of nature and working *with* people. HER story is also about the importance of learning new things and not

getting embroiled in other people's indoctrinations. Being creative is so important and so is teaching others in informal ways.

Sadly there were few of her generation who could attend this celebration as they were either too frail or had past on. To my delight she was not forgotten by my generation as out of the woodwork came friends that my siblings and I went to school with. Why should I be surprised that even after 40 years since I left school some came to pay their last respects?

My older brother's school friend said as a young man she was the first person who spoke to him like an adult. Like others, she had taught me it is OK to ask many questions!

In HER way my mother wanted to stand up with courage. Now I see how much I am like my mother, HER story, HER experiences, HER beliefs and ways of seeing issues in the world.

However HER story was also informed by HER mother's story. My grandmother was born in India at the time of the Raj, the Great British Empire ... She was descended from a French mother and Scottish father who was a doctor in the military. Her father was killed one night on duty when she was 4 years old. Her mother re-married but she did not have a happy childhood and in those days children were to be seen and

not heard! My grandmother left India to live in England as a young bride never to see her mother or family members again. Not long after her arrival in England as a foreign land (and yet she was born British) she had her two children – my mother and my uncle. Soon World War II broke out, Britain went to war, planes took to the skies and bombs were dropping around them.

Perhaps like many of you here tonight and many other British families who experienced evacuation and resettlement, my grandmother and her young family were shipped off

to live in Egypt for a few years while my grandfather served in the military out there. Having lived in hot army barracks under North African sun it was not long before the young family were evacuated to a whole new world leaving my grandfather behind to defend the territory. During which time he was wounded twice in battle and if stories are true, the experiences may have contributed to his own challenges he was later to have.

My mother had told me the story of all ships in the region being called to evacuate mothers and children from the Port of Alexandria. Rommel and his men were advancing through the desert and this triggered emergency for safety. HER story tells how their ship went zig-zagging through the rough Atlantic Ocean to dodge the German U-boats as they headed off down to the Southern hemisphere. As a 10 year-old she and her 6 year old brother found the idea of being hunted by the enemy submarines exciting and enjoyed running around on deck. However, perhaps not surprising as an older women it was clear this early experience had left its imprint.

What I know about my mother's mother is that like my mother she also wanted to use her Voice to speak out against what she experienced and witnessed in life and saw around her. But like many women still do today these women succumbed to silence, masculine ritual and tradition believing they had no Voice.

Unbeknown to my mother at this time of World War II was that she would marry into a family encountering another women who very amiably stepped into a leadership role. My father's mother took it upon herself to successfully manage and build up a family friend's transport business when he went off to join the Great War.

Perhaps you don't know this but a lot of South Africans participated in the Great War because at the time SA was a British Colony. My uncle (my father's brother) being one of them and he too was injured in the War. He lived his life with observable physical scars and I am told this experience is what led to him returning home with a newly acquired introverted personality. At one point while still living in SA I worked for a

decorated Spitfire pilot. So tonight as international women let us briefly also remember the many men who stood for making a difference in our lives.

At the end of the War, my father's mother was expected to hand back the reigns of the friend's transport business when he returned home unscathed. This grandmother like the many married women at that time working at Rolls Royce was told she no longer had a role in business because her husband could take care of her. This very act promotes an opinion about vulnerability of women. I am told at this point this grandmother became introverted and for a short while went into a short period of soul searching. However having worked through this period in her life she realized not only was she grieving for loss of identity (the woman as leader she briefly became), but she was living life with the British stiff upper lip and had not grieved two still births and her own parents marital breakdown as a young child. She too was never to see her father again because in those days divorce was taboo!

Interestingly, when I received my Inspirational Women's Award 2 years ago I found it quite difficult. 😊😊😊

Why me I asked?

Today I say: why not me?

Question: So why do I tell their story?

Like my mother and my grandmothers, they were no different to so many women who keep their voices hidden and their power and truths locked away inside them!

For us younger generation, do we spend quality time on things that matter to women like asking our mother and grandmother about HER story?

Do we have any idea about the kinds of hardships women before us experienced and how this has paved the way for us today?

While much may have changed on the surface, there is still much more change needed because regardless of country, women still succumb to hardship.

I tell this story because just like my story you have a woman in your life and she will have HER story and every women and female child on this planet will be growing HER own story.

So where is Leadership in this?

Q. As leaders do we do enough to help women understand how their family history shapes their lives?

Sisters [and brothers] you don't need me to tell you for women in general to get to their place in history the journey has probably seemed like one step forward and two steps backwards. This is probably no different for women in formalized leadership roles.

An inspirational women leader knows if she focuses on image and power it will ultimately be to her detriment. Rather, her qualities are that she's curious and values making a difference and learning new things. She also is likely to know something about how HER history has been shaped. She has a social network and uses her imagination and intuition ... a women's way of knowing so I have heard men say!!! They know they have a story and that people have helped them get to where they are.

An inspirational women leader knows there is a lot more still to be done to bring fairness and equal rights for women globally. In some areas cultural practices and resolving societal issues remain many steps behind. This kind of leader also knows more opportunities are needed for women to enter formal leadership roles.

There is something wonderful about leadership happening here tonight.

More women are being recognized for their leadership Voice and standing up in their own woman right.

I DON'T KNOW ABOUT YOU BUT I FIND RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN THE MEDIA INSPIRATIONAL!

Recently, women have been taking to the streets again to show their democratic view and declare they won't keep quiet anymore. We even saw this in Antarctica!

These women make me want to ask more questions:

Q: Isn't it interesting that women can make their case heard peacefully through singing?

Astonishing, in contrast to some men who would probably take up verbal threat or aggressively seek power and control. In some cases men take up arms to satisfy their egotistical needs through brutality.

Q. Why is it that when there is a community struggle, it is often the women from all walks of life who step in to resolve the issues arising?

I am not saying men don't get involved, because some do. However typically women come together to encourage exchange, build relationships and partnerships. In Derby and Derbyshire alone, look around you and see the many community projects started by inspirational women.

Q. Why are there still fewer women in higher earning professions?

Q. Why are women so outnumbered in politics and shot down while practicing democracy?

Q. Why is it that a Government can still suppress information from its citizens?

Q. Why is there still gender pay inequality and not equal opportunities in the workplace?

Q. Why is the Female species still exploited ... even in so-called 'developed' countries?

If I may briefly agree with something: post-feminism is a myth! Its nonsense!

We have to continue to use our Voices to bring change. There seem to be intentional misrepresentations like what women stand for is being anti-male and a threat to families.

I stand up for women but I don't hate men? How could I?

I am a mother of 3 well-balanced adult sons whom I have encouraged since birth to make Female friends as part of their social networks. The difference is I believe in having choices and rights which many women and girls are denied.

I am pro women and pro men.

For those of us with roles in some guise of leadership or at a vantage point in our careers, we can make a difference. In a democratic society it is essential to ask questions. Did I say democratic?

An inspirational woman leader is known for asking challenging questions, to ask what will be different to bring change and what will be in place to make things happen?

Earlier I said: why not me?

Because today I can say 'I am become'. Therefore like other inspirational women leaders I am known to ask questions and I will continue to learn new things and break my own perceived boundaries. What won't get in my way are the few men and women posing as men who have asked me if I am a square peg trying to fit into a round hole? How shallow can they be?

Like many women I have encountered people who told to me to conform because apparently I do not have a voice! I believe if we don't ask questions we don't learn, we don't progress and innovation and change does not happen.

Q. So what makes the inspirational women leader?

These women dare to be different. They are prepared to stand up for what they believe in and value most. They do what they think is right! There is not a woman in this room tonight who was not born with a beautiful voice. Be inspired to have the courage to challenge the many inconvenient truths in our world today. These are often lurking in 'darkness' beneath the many rhetorical political claims. You see these presented by 'those in authority' often set to mask continual problems that fester like wounds in a demoralized society.

We can help women to see themselves as leader, to be the authors of their own lives. I believe in education we can challenge some of the extraordinary bureaucratic shortsighted and reductionist practices. These serve little more than producing a human identity that is viewed as a dysfunctional object requiring remedial intervention!

Let me ask you this:

Q. Who had teacher feedback in a school report that said you were “not good enough” or “could do better?”

You know what I’m talking about.

Q. Who experienced predicted attainment levels that graded you within a higher or lower ability category?

That says little about your true potential or ability?

Q. Who did the IQ test at school?

My informed voice knows now there is no agreed definition of IQ. The concept is all about standardization and measurement to categorize the individual according to a norm. Now tell me, where is the progress?

Q. In education today sometimes we can ask: where is the learning?

From my vantage point, there seem to be too many over-zealous short-term measures implemented as a quick fix method. These often rely on subjective and assumptive judgments by people who are not suitably qualified or trained.

In my job I typically encounter women and men who have been through the UK educational system. Many tell me their school experience has led to self-doubt and this still shapes their adult life. But sadly this is not unique to UK.

Working with senior leaders and managers in the UK I have often heard cutting remarks and judgment of others. Sometimes I wonder if this is a façade because away from public you hear self-limiting assumptions in their speech patterns and some come

to take off their mask. I'm sure you have heard this too and how people put themselves down in the eyes of others.

Q. Is it any wonder in public some do the same to others as they think of themselves?

If you really listen to peoples' narrative, I mean really listen! The message received in their formative years has informed the stories they come to tell themselves. As adults this is frequently about their capability, potential and ability to learn new skills or cope.

I am astounded by how many people talk in a self-deprecating way. If this is how they perceive themselves my question to them is:

Q. Are you expecting the same of others?

Listen to the people telling you: "I'm stupid"; "I'm so rubbish at ... "; "I'm useless" and "I'm hopeless". Is this really about them and their identity? Or the result of a message informed by standardized methods encountered in education? Or about the social and societal language patterns they have adopted?

In adults and young children we can also hear people say "I will never be good at it" and "I can't, because ..."

I propose the resolve lies somewhere in understanding that something has imprinted on their belief system.

Q. So what is this telling us about their expectations and aspirations?

It is telling me how much work we have still to get done. It is also telling me there are inspiring leaders waiting to find their voices!

I have seen this pattern reflected in men and women in management and leadership roles with different levels of responsibility and across sectors in small and large organizations. I can tell you it is so easy to spot those who elevate themselves through a perceived status to gain a sense of power and control. Interestingly, they usually call themselves leaders when their actions do little more than judge others. There are those who quite openly stereotype but probably don't know it, and there are plenty who have yet to find their Voice. The one's I would like to challenge are those that create the policies to enforce operation as leader in job title by name only as part of hierarchical structure and those that discriminate against women and operate on the fringe of unethical behaviour.

I believe if people were allowed to be inspirational at work we would not witness the levels of demoralization and discontent mentioned in work related surveys or the excuses brought on by tensions, internal power struggles and fire-fighting behaviours. It seems in practice today in many organizations there is a kind of 'leadership' that induces paralysis by analysis and naval gazing.

Gather others around you and let's walk together towards to the future...

Q. What else is going to be done about employment statistics that reveal unfair gender 'gaps' across many sectors?

Q. What else is going to be done about more opportunities for flexible working arrangements?

Actually, for men and women alike!

At executive and senior leadership levels the Male Female ratio is abysmal.

Too often when women take a career break to have family they say goodbye to aspirations without even realizing it.

Q. Is this because traditionally women were or still are 'schooled' to put others before themselves?

Tonight I share my Voice about what I think the Woman in Leadership Voice is about. I don't believe in a male dominated world or that as women we are to conform and be passive. I believe in mutual respect, integrity, loyalty, dialogue and purpose. Wouldn't it be wonderful if Women in Leadership were always offered the same?

As I prepared my talk I was thinking ...

Q. Is it too much to imagine a society where women who were born 'free' can be free?

Q. Is it too much to be respectful of women, to be kind, caring and welcoming of the richness and difference they can bring?

Q. So how can you make a difference?

The inspired women leader knows they are part of something much bigger than their own little world. They know how to help women see beyond current expectations and an assumed boundary. They can help other women find their inner Voice, and help them contribute to creating and sustaining their own and their society's future.

As leaders in our own right I believe it is our right as women to lobby Governments, to challenge authorities and politicians until we bring the right answers. For us in

leadership roles or at vantage points, do not forget to challenge those who make decisions and take actions to keep women subservient. Sisters [and brothers] of all generations, we are all leaders. Remember we were all born free, so don't forget this.

Recently I encountered a woman not much older than me.

She has reached the pinnacle of career status in her public health profession.

She holds a senior academic title at national exec board level. Sounds great BUT 15 years ago she was only the 3rd female professor in the UK to enter this male territory. We are talking 21st Century here! At her first board meeting she was indirectly referred to by the Chairman who asked: "Did the statutory member have something to say?" Sadly, such divisive and derogatory comments exist today!

To women already in senior leadership roles, do you ever ask yourself what is leadership?

Q. Is it right that women are expected to climb an assumed or fake ladder to become a person?

Q. Surely we all make a difference and it's OK to see ourselves as a self-led leader?

Is this not in whichever way or whoever we are with? The answer is probably somewhere in knowing each small thing we do to enable others is leadership.

What I do know is that whatever we do it is magnified through the imprint we make on another person's life.

I have come this far and wonder if it really is possible to define leadership as only a few things. What I also know is that leadership involves listening and integrity.

And finally ...

Sisters, whatever your age, look around you, it is the truth.

Real women come in all colours, shapes and sizes.

We are united by our womanhood.

We don't need other people, marketing or media to tell us how we should be.

We also don't need others to tell us what to look like or how to live our lives.

We are able and beautiful in our own skin – inside and out.

We all have a voice worthy of being listened to.

We are all internationalists!

As we come together to celebrate our new Inspirational Women tonight and mark the beginning of new opportunities, let our Women's Voices sing out loud.

Thank you.