

DEBORAH HAYDON

Deborah Haydon prepared this to be given to the winner of the Deborah Haydon Scholarship in 2015.

I was one of the lucky ones – born in 1950, I arrived at Canterbury University, in Christchurch, New Zealand in 1969, when university attendance was free. Had it not been so, I suspect I would not have attended and my subsequent life would have been very different.

By 1982, in Australia, it was clear that an undergraduate arts degree was simply not enough so, after research, copious amounts of letter writing and a fortuitous visit, in 1984 I was accepted into Cornell University's Master of Professional Studies (Communication Arts) program. For 18 months I lived in upstate New York and experienced the joys of walking to class through winter snow – fairy tale white crystals when it first appears, ugly grey, wet sludge as it melts. I do have to say though, that fall colour, in a good autumn weather, really is to die for.

Returning to Melbourne in 1986 my skills, with some judicious manoeuvring, probably should have seen me set up for my working life. It didn't quite work out like that. Fortunately however, my life outside work came to the rescue.

In 1997 an older friend invited me to attend a Peninsula Branch meeting of the Australian Federation of University Women Victoria. (AFUW Vic was the former name of Graduate Women Victoria.) The Branch was by then in decline but I still remember my first meeting. The speaker, a member, talked about the changes she and her husband had seen as Hong Kong approached its reunification with mainland China. What a revelation to find a social occasion at which women could talk intelligently without being considered at all odd. I remained involved with Peninsula Branch, acting as president for several years, until it wound up about 10 years later. I still wish I could have been a member in the '60s and '70s when branch activity was at its height - although preparing the monthly luncheon (the meeting format in those days), when it came to your turn, might have been a little stressful.

During that time I became more involved with the central branch of AFUW Vic (now Graduate Women Victoria or GWV), serving on the committee as a member, as minute secretary for a year and I ran the administration behind the 2003 Australian Federation of University Women triennial conference – a most interesting experience that from time-to-time tested my problem-solving skills to their limits.

In 2006 I became part of the Australian Federation of Graduate Women National Executive as the Treasurer – a challenging task for someone with no formal accounting or financial skills. Along with the rest of the Executive I then agreed to undertake a second three-year term of office. By that time the Global Financial Crisis was beginning to bite. It was decided that we needed to move the Education Trust

Funds (which underpin the scholarships awarded at the national level) to a better-performing investment environment. Our choice quickly proved less than successful so that over the second term, based on discussions with knowledgeable members, I determined that management of the Education Trust Funds should be carried out by a professional organisation able to provide both tax deductibility for donations and a clear long term strategy for protecting and growing those precious funds. Despite the careful advocacy of those in support of the proposal, the concept proved very difficult to sell. Nevertheless at the 2012 Triennium a better medium-term management strategy was approved for the Education Trust Funds. Perhaps not ideal, but an improvement.

Is this relevant to you, right now? Probably not, you may say with a fulfilling career stretching out before you – and it may never be. But, I would like to hope, somewhere in the back of your mind, you are aware that valuable experience can be gained outside formal work settings. Some very good people – both women and men work in areas where, as well as learning from them you can give something back to your community. I have had the opportunity to grow into tasks that I might not otherwise had the opportunity to attempt and I have succeeded. I have also had the opportunity to work collegially rather than competitively for goals that I believe in – I hope you do too.