

Speech for Silk Party 14 June 2016

124 years ago in 1892 the Borough Polytechnic Institute was established with the mission to “promote the industrial skill, general knowledge, health and well-being of young men and women” living in some of the poorest communities of the country.

It was set up by a local solicitor, Edric Bayley, who wanted to establish a technical college in Elephant & Castle to help tackle the extreme poverty that there was in the area at the time. The curriculum was based around the industries local to Southwark, with the intention that people could enhance their employment prospects through training in relevant skills and technologies.

Today I am proud to be part of the successor University which is committed to our original mission and to strive to ensure that our students overcome the barriers to their future careers which all too often appear even now in the 21st Century.

I am in a privileged position this evening in order to give a long thank you to all of you who I have met along this eventful way in our fight for peace, justice, and for human rights.

As a start I would like to thank Andy Unger and all my colleagues in the staff of the Law Department. It has been a privilege working with such a committed team during the last 4 years.

I have also had enormous pleasure working with our students whose enthusiasm for law and justice is an encouragement to us all and is a very good sign for the future of the legal profession.

For the last 40 years my husband Jose Olivares has been my great supporter and I am very grateful for his love, kindness and sense of humour.

I hope you get a chance to meet him this evening, and also my son Jose Olivares Chandler, who some of our students already know, having met him at Court and on mini pupillages at 1 Mitre Court Buildings.

Some of you, especially our students, know that I was a postgraduate student here from 1980 to 1982 studying for the Certificate of Qualification in Social Work. I am delighted that Anthony Kendall, who was our Head of Course is here.

The course was entitled Social Work in the Community and I was sent with the Lewisham Cluster of students on placements in Deptford, particularly in the North Lewisham Law Centre and the Albany Welfare Rights Unit. I soon saw that social work was changing and that the incoming 1979 government did not share our commitment to people’s rights, and that the law was the ultimate protection for our rights.

From 1982 to 1992 I worked in the welfare rights unit of the North Lewisham Law Centre located in the Albany Centre in Deptford. We were all immensely grateful for the support of the local solicitors and I especially welcome Dora Christodoulou, Denise Philips, Carol Storer and Gill Butler from those days. We were pioneers in establishing the Black Articled Clerk Scheme, and a special welcome to Pip Salvador-Jones, who was one of the pioneers in the Black Articled Clerk scheme.

I was encouraged by a Law Centre colleague, Saimo Chahal QC (Hon), another pioneer in the Black Articled Clerk scheme, to study the CPE conversion course at night and after

completing the Law Society Finals I did my articles in Peckham at Glazer Delmar from 1993 to 1995. I am delighted to welcome Hugh Southey, from our days in Peckham, Hugh is now a QC in Matrix Chambers.

While I was at Glazer Delmar I became active in the Law Society's trainee solicitors group and this was where I met Andy Unger for the first time.

He was in the Young Solicitors Group, and I attended one of the YSG meetings to ask for support for a Trainee Solicitors Group project. We were turned down but afterwards Andy gave me some much needed advice on improving my persuasive powers!

I was given my first job on qualification by David Taylor at Hanne & Co. Mind you, I thought I had blown it when I came into the room for my job interview, having taken a deep breath, extended my hand to shake David's and made eye contact.... and promptly tripped up on the floor cables and landed on David's desk.

This was 1995 and before wireless internet access..... and before health and safety rules! David saw something in me and gave me my first job as a solicitor. Thank you David.

Those were my early days of the Young Solicitors Group (the YSG) and we were a pretty vocal crowd. And welcome to those of you who are here: Catherine Bradley now a Judge, Richard Moorhead now a Professor, Rebecca Parkman now a partner in her firm.

We realised that young solicitors were unwilling to tell their bosses that they were doing pro bono volunteering and so we decided on a strategy to raise the profile of pro bono. In 1998 we launched the YSG awards with Andrew Boon and Andrew Phillips among our judges.

The first winner Mary-Ann Wright, is with us tonight and not only a pioneer in pro bono, she later became Chair of YSG and today is Chair of the Women Lawyers Division.

From our early promotion of pro bono along with the Solicitors Pro Bono Group, we were proud to be part of Lord Peter Goldsmith's initiative in creating the Attorney General's Pro Bono Committee. Peter had already been a pioneer in founding the Bar Pro Bono Unit.

We were also encouraged in our pro bono efforts by the Rt Honourable Patricia Scotland QC, now Secretary General of the Commonwealth, and an inspiration to our students.

From Hanne & Co I went to Plumstead Law Centre in 1998 and thank Monika Pirani, former Chair of the Management Committee for her years of dedication. Those were the days of the formation of the Community Legal Service and we had a lot of misgivings about the direction in which legal aid was going.

There were many of us in the South London Law Society in those days who campaigned for access to justice and against the erosion of legal aid provision. And we are still campaigning today.

In 2002 I was elected to the Law Society Council to represent solicitors in the voluntary sector, a small, but vitally important part of the Law Society, and Law Centres Network's Julie Bishop is here this evening,

Julie moved from Australia to become the Chief Executive of the Law Centres Network and is a formidable colleague in sustaining the Law Centre movement through the trials of loss of legal aid and other funding.

Robert Bourns, Vice President of the Law Society is on his way here from Manchester and there are several of our Law Society Council colleagues here including Sarah Austin and

Stephanie Boyce from the Women Lawyers Division, and Matt Allan from the Junior Lawyers Division along with Lucy Scott Moncrieff, Andrew Caplen, both Past Presidents, David Taylor and Jeffrey Forrest.

In February 2003 I became the first solicitor employed to supervise the newly established Legal Advice Clinic at the College of Law. We had a memorable team serving members of the public and I welcome Pamela Robotham, Sally Gill, Sharon Anthony Tewkesbury, Anna Steiner, Tejal Roma Karia and Sonia Kalsi, who pioneered the Legal Aid route to the LPC. Thank you team, for your unswerving support and friendship.

I am happy to welcome members of the two local law societies in which I have been active: from the South London Law Society: President Gareth Ledsham, Stephen Whitaker, Mala Parmar, Dominic Lindsay, and David Taylor.

Our local Law societies are supported by Mark Hudson and Jaymie Wooldridge, the Law Society Greater London team, and I am delighted to welcome Jaymie.

I am also a member of City of Westminster & Holborn Law Society: and I welcome President Edward Macey Dare, along with Arthur Weir, Fraser Whitehead, Laura McKoy, Jeffrey Forrest and David Morgan, who is a Past President of the Federation of European Bar Associations, and who with Jeffrey Forrest supported my nomination for the Presidency of the Federation, Thank you David.

Thanks to the strong commitment of City of Westminster & Holborn Law Society we have been able to support human rights lawyers at risk of assassination in Colombia for over ten years. I am delighted that members of the Colombia Caravana, our international network of jurists are here, including Wout Albers from Lawyers for Lawyers in the Netherlands, Sue Willman the current Caravana Chair and three of our founder members, Alison Parkinson, Jeffrey Forrest and Courtney Barklem, along with Law Society Human Rights Committee stalwarts Alastair Logan and Sarah Smith.

It is a mystery to most of us how someone becomes an Honorary QC. The process is one of nomination by our peers, and I am immensely grateful to the Association of Women Solicitors who nominated me. Happily AWS members: Coral Hill, Darlene Waithe, Diana Benjamin and Alison Parkinson are here today.

And a big thank you to Linda Davies, who could not be with us. Thank you to all those who endorsed the nomination including Lucy Scott Moncrieff and Andrew Caplen, both past Presidents of the Law Society, and Andrew, Lord Phillips of Sudbury (retired).

Thanks to the Future Lawyers Project and all the firms who have given our students opportunities on placement, especially to Hanne & Co and David Taylor; Anthony Gold Solicitors Emma Tante; Russell Cooke solicitors and Gareth Ledsham; Tuckers: Ian Powell and Sital Bhojani; Deigton Pierce Glynn : Sue Willman and Polly Glynn; Philcox Grey and Sheila Donn; Wainwright Cummins: Andrew Wainwright & Richard Reid; Hansen Palomares, Ole Hansen and Maria Palomares; Fisher Meredith: Richard Busby; Southwark Council Legal Department and Joanna Martin and our local Law Centres: Southwark Law Centre and Sally Causer; Lambeth Law Centre and Angus King; and Cambridge House Law Centre and Pamela Robotham.

We really appreciate your understanding of the importance of positive practical experiences for our students in surmounting the invisible barriers to social mobility and enabling them to proceed to future employment in their desired careers.

Thank you to all of you who have given talks to our students in our Employability Series, especially Judges Tan Ikram and Alison McKenna, Elizabeth Woodcraft of Garden Court Chambers and Nick Young of DAC Beachcroft, Samuel Genen of Harrow law Centre, Pamela Robotham of Cambridge House Law Centre, Emma Tante of Anthony Gold, Ian Powell and Sital Bhojani of Tuckers.

We are immensely grateful to the staff and Judges at Lambeth County Court who have taken our students under their wing and enabled them to learn so much. Thank you especially to Judge Parul Desai and Judge Suzanne Burn.

Thank you to all our students who volunteer in the Legal Advice Clinic, and in the Help Desk teams at Lambeth County Court. You are an inspiration for us old timers, we appreciate your enthusiasm for justice, your joy when you are able to help someone and eagerness to learn. You are our ambassadors of the future, and to all of you I say, congratulations.

I conclude, with a special request to all our guests here today, if you have not yet joined our placement scheme then please sign up today. Talk to one of us. You will be very welcome in the LSBU family. We are all part of a strong body of the legal profession who are committed to serving justice, defending the rule of law, protecting and promoting human rights and serving the community, ensuring that everyone can get access to justice especially when they cannot afford to pay.

I hope that now we have reached the end of my speech you all feel that this award of QC is a recognition of all of us who champion pro bono and who fight for human rights and justice.

I am honoured that you are here to share this celebration.

Thank you.