

AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL FOR THE DEFENCE OF GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS

PRESS RELEASE 652#

Wendy McCarthy Treasures the Opportunities Provided by Her Public School Education

I often say to young people when I talk to them about education: it's one of the few gifts society can give you that no one can ever take away.

Treasure it. Wendy McCarthy

In the last week a very prominent public figure in Australia, Wendy McCarthy not only thanked her public schools and their teachers for the opportunities offered her.

She advised young people to treasure those educational opportunities that still exist – thanks to the battles fought by public school teachers and other public school supporters.

In the Fairfax media, Wendy McCarthy told of her journey from a one-teacher school to her various positions as high school teacher; chairwoman of headspace (the National Youth Mental Health Foundation) and of Circus Oz.; deputy chairwoman of the ABC and chancellor of the University of Canberra.

This is her story:

My father fought in the Second World War. He went into the army and when he came home he got a soldier settlement block in quite a remote part of NSW out of Forbes.

I went to a one-teacher primary school of 25 or 26 kids. My family talked a lot, they were sociable and they had books. I was a voracious reader from the age of seven. Mostly I read and listened to ABC radio.

How did that equip me? I didn't have a chance if you believe all the philosophy about how to be a big success in life.

But in my year at Forbes High School there were 14 kids. One became a physics gold medallist and, out of the 14, I think something like eight ended up with university degrees.

There was a civic sense in the town. The day Forbes High School became a full high school at the end of my third year they had processions in the street. When they got an Olympic swimming pool it was a huge issue.

No one in my family had ever gone to university but education was celebrated. I knew I had to work for it but it was also kind of normal to be educated.

[In her final year Wendy went to Tamworth High School.] Teachers asked me: "would you like to go to university?" They said: "we'll help you fill out the forms."

My state school teachers fought for clever kids. They saw that as part of their duty to assist and enable.

I was offered a Commonwealth scholarship and a teachers college scholarship. I ended up taking the teaching one and I knew, in order to stay there, I had to pass each year.

I was 16 when I finished school and went to the University of New England in Armidale. I was there for four years and did an arts degree and a diploma of education.

So, at the age of 20, I was teaching in the classroom with four years of university education [behind me]. It was fun, I loved it.

I wouldn't have been able to go to university without a scholarship and I knew there was a social contract. I knew when I finished I would be a teacher.

I still have that sense of a social contract. I still think I owe my society and community something for having invested in me. Sometimes we just forget these really basic things.

I often say to young people when I talk to them about education: it's one of the few gifts society can give you that no one can ever take away.

Treasure it.

Read more: <http://www.afr.com/leadership/careers/wendy-mccarthys-journey-from-a-oneteacher-school-to-the-peak-of-leadership-20160410-go2pkp#ixzz45Z5OUJul>

A more detailed interview on her work in the Womens Electoral Lobby is found at <http://www.smh.com.au/money/investing/profile-wendy-mccarthy-20110711-1hb4h.html#ixzz45Z6HtqVs>

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