

Atrocities Past and Present

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ANZAC day is a day of reflection — of remembrance — and of respect, a day in which we and millions alike gather to commemorate the men and women who have served in protecting our country. These special people have been given the name the ANZACs, The Australian and New Zealand army corps.

This is a day set aside for us to collectively give thanks to all those who have put their lives at risk and in many cases paid the supreme sacrifice in times of war, and to thank their families for their sacrifices.

This is a day to take pride in our national identity. The spirit created by these amazing people must encourage us to carry on striving for a nation that reflects the ANZAC's finest qualities, courage, bravery, commitment, endurance and mateship.

The 25th April each year is the date on which we commemorate. Why? Because 92 years ago, Australians arrived on the shores of Gallipoli, to face almost certain death for the country they loved and at the same time gain the respect of the rest of the world. It was here in the horror of warfare, where lives were destroyed and all hope seemed lost, our national identity was forged.

But of course it is not just Gallipoli or the birth of the ANZAC spirit we remember on this day, nor is it even the World War I. It is every single person who has put themselves in danger for another Australian in times of war.

Not many of us are called upon to place our lives in danger for others. We admire those who do. We hope that, if we were

called on to do so, we would not be found wanting. But each and every one of us can make our community a better place to live in by simply reflecting the ANZAC ideals through our behaviour towards one another.

ANZAC Day is therefore a day for all Australians, regardless of religion, racial background or even place of birth. It is a day to commemorate the bravery and self-sacrifice of past and present generations. It is a day to acknowledge the selflessness of all those who have been prepared to lay down their lives for Australia so that it can be a place of freedom for all.

ANZAC Day is not merely a date, or a remote campaign, but rather a spirit. It is a spirit compounded of courage, bravery, commitment, loyalty, faith, selflessness, comradeship and cooperation — a spirit of moral as well as physical toughness, a spirit that will never be forgotten.

I wrote and presented this speech for the ANZAC Day celebrations on the 25th April 2007, my voice joining thousands of others throughout the world, acknowledging the injustices of the past. However, one of history's greatest silences is occurring now and we have the power to stop it.

“She was not made of his head to top him; nor out of his feet to be trampled upon by him; but out of his side, to be equal with him. The creation of women, according to the Bible.” However, this idea has been slaughtered, through many diverse reasons from religion and culture to family pride. It is evident that the inequality of the sexes in society today is extremely unfair and unjust.

Violence in society is evident from playground bullying to world wars. However, some types of violence, that are purposefully and cruelly intended, are ignored and accepted by society: violence against women. Some women and girls are brutalised from cradle to death simply because of their gender. It is the most pervasive human rights violation in the world today.

The International Criminal Court now regards rape as a war crime, as a crime against humanity and as an act of genocide. The treaty makes enforced prostitution, rape, sexual slavery, forced pregnancy, enforced sterilisation and other forms

of sexual violence of similar severity illegal, accompanied with severe penalties.

The recent story of Mukhtaran Mai, a young woman from the poor Punjab area of Pakistan, who was sentenced to be gang raped, is an example of how this treaty is ineffective. After asking the village council to intervene in a case involving her 12-year-old brother, who was accused of having an illicit affair with one of the women of the Mastoi clan, Mukhtaran Mai received her punishment. Having raped her, the men striped her naked and paraded her around the streets.

When the men were finished with Mai, she was supposed to kill herself out of an act of dignity and respect for herself and family. She did not. Mai pressed charges against all six of the men. Things seemed to be going right for her, until the judge acquitted five of the six men, and the sixth man was put on probation.

Clearly justice has not been served, and it is no surprise the people who acquitted the men were in fact male. The patriarchal society that some women live in is destroying their sense of self worth and killing their souls.

If this violation of women continues they will become an “endangered species”. In India, due to dowry-related issues, between 3 to 5 million female foetuses are being aborted each year. In a Bombay clinic, 7999 out of 8000 aborted foetuses were female.

It is not only women in Third World countries that are facing a horrific quality of life, the abuse of women is occurring all around the world. In America a woman is raped on average every 90 seconds, and every 15 seconds a woman is beaten by a male stranger or someone she knows.

Society can no longer just punish individual acts, the challenge is to change the perception, sometimes so unconscious and ingrained, that women are fundamentally of less value than men. It is only when women and girls gain their place as strong and equal members of society that violence against them will be viewed as a shocking atrocity rather than an invisible normality.

Of course, it is vital to remember our past and heritage, however, we must begin to concentrate on our present for the future generations.



Katie Bishop wrote this essay in 2007 when she was in Year 12 at Padbury Senior High School, Padbury, Western Australia.