



## **Super woman and your community**

### **Truby King Memorial presentation**

### **Plunket Volunteers Conference**

### **Palmerston North**

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Presenter:

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## **Introduction**

Tena koutou tena koutou tena koutou katoa, Bula, Hullo and Greetings

It is with great pleasure that I present this Fourth Truby King Memorial lecture to the Plunket Volunteers Conference here in Palmerston North today.

It is a pleasure because

- a) I was a Plunket mother,
- b) I am a Plunket grandmother and
- c) I was certainly a Plunket baby, sharing a Karitane nurse with my twin sister almost 60 years ago.

Yes I was brought up in the four hourly feeds and the disciplined philosophy of Truby King - and live to show it didn't do me that much damage!

I might add that my first son was also brought up on four hourly feeds - and at times I have my doubts! The second of my children was more relaxed and the third still more relaxed with feeding on demand, but all three were Plunket babies and we still have their baby books to tease them with.

Now my grand children have had the benefits of your care and support.

I am also delighted to be your speaker, because I believe in the important role Plunket plays in the community and I wish to support your goals and objectives.

A couple of weeks ago I spent the morning with Plunket nurse Sarah Priday in Wellington and I was so impressed. Congratulations on a wonderful organisation that provides a vital bridge between home and the community for so many people.

Today I am going to talk about **you** first, then your communities and your relationship with them, and will then just touch on issues relating to babies or children and your home.

I am going to use this opportunity to share some of my ideas that hopefully support you as you engage positively with your families and communities, and while at the same time you enhance your own wellbeing and the wellbeing of New Zealand as a whole. No small task I suggest!

## ***Superwoman***

My talk today starts from you. Mostly I am talking to the women here today.

This is because you have been extending your lives by volunteering to help others as they bring up families in your community.

This issues raised will also be of interest to the men in the audience, but

sorry, my words today are directed mostly to the women. I make no apology for this.

I call you all Superwoman.

I do this because we have set such a high standard. Our society is setting this standard these days for mothers. A standard, with demands that exceeds anything that could have been envisaged by any previous generation.

We are expecting you to be mother, carer, income earner, lover, driver, volunteer, budget controller, home executive, gardener, laundry maid, cook and housekeeper and all within the same 7 day week times 24 hours a day or as the song we have just heard "8 days a week".

You do are indeed superwomen!

This presentation today celebrate that, and looks for a few extra signposts that can make your way easier or more comfortable, away that can make your lives more satisfying and hopefully a bit less stressful.

Certainly many of you need to make your lives more fun.

### ***Your Wellbeing***

This talk is placing emphasis on your wellbeing and the wellbeing of your family and then the bridge to the community.

The June 2005 NEXT magazine had the results of their latest Health and Wellbeing Survey<sup>1</sup>.

What that article showed was that the readers of Next Magazine, women in the upper income brackets

- a) experience depression -42 per cent claim to have suffered from depression;
- b) 48 per cent have had counselling and 79 percent of those found it helpful;
- c) 75 per cent exercise regularly;
- d) 50% have experience back problems;
- e) 53 percent do not have enough 'me' time - yet 73 per cent feel that regular time out is very important.

These figure, I believe, give us a snap shot of something that is happening with some women. Sure, the readers were from Next magazine and the figures I would suggest would be a bit more extreme if taken across all social economic groups.

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<sup>1</sup> Schumacher, Shiree, *Your health – The Full picture* – results of health survey – Next magazine:Auckland June 2005: Pps 71 -77

What the article also told me was that we are trying too hard and sometimes that does not work.

While some of you are really coping with what is increasingly called "life work balance" others of you are not coping or coping most of the time but not all the time.

How many of you cope all the time? How many of you cope 50% of the time?

If you haven't put your hand up maybe you are not even coping 50% of the time. I believe there will be some here - and I think you are fine - balancing home, work, children and finding any "me" time is almost impossible.

## **Connection**

Today my talk is about you and is an attempt to suggest a different way to look at your lives and maybe to give you a different tool to help you enjoy life better.

I am going to talk about connecting with your family and the community and about these very over used words "Wellbeing" and "Culture".

## **What is Wellbeing**

So what is wellbeing and why is this important for you to understand?

Our Local Government Act 2002<sup>2</sup> directs local government in New Zealand to promote this concept.

In fact one of the purposes of local government is to promote the social, economic, environmental and cultural wellbeing of communities for the present and for the future.

This is not the only time the government or the media are using the word *wellbeing*.

The Ministry of Social Development uses it; magazines use it; and we hear the word used in reference to many of our activities, activities of schools and the way our communities are meant to react.

So what is well being. Well the various dictionaries are explicit. They all give almost the same definition.

Well-being is health, happiness and prosperity.

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<sup>2</sup> 2002 Local Government Act. Purposes of Local Government..

Well we hear a lot about health and prosperity. But, not often do we hear happiness as part of the equation.

In the Local Government Act the *wellbeings* are qualified and there are four of them. Social, Environmental, Economic and Cultural Wellbeing.

All of the four parts of your wellbeing are important.

They are called the “quadruple bottom line of sustainable development” – today I am really going to talk about your cultural wellbeing and how that connects you to your communities.

But before I start on cultural wellbeing, I will note that all the four wellbeings are important.

### ***Cultural Wellbeing***

This speech is concentrating on cultural wellbeing and about how you can understand your culture and the cultures around you, thus enabling you to improve and enhance your wellbeing.

Maybe this speech will enable you to understand more about yourself and from there gain an understanding of the dynamics of your lives, your home and the work environment around you.

### **Culture**

So let’s talk a bit about culture – understanding this may enable us to go on a voyage of exploration of ourselves – yes all of you, Maori, Pacific Island, Chinese, South African, Indian, Iranian, Pakeha, whatever.–You all have your own cultures, much of which was inherited.

Let’s be a bit theoretical’.

I want us to define what the word *culture* in the New Zealand context. This gives our analysis a form and structure. One you can follow as well.

So does this word mean?

The UNESCO definition, adopted in the 2001 Declaration on Cultural Diversity<sup>3</sup>, helps us to understand the word in the modern context.

That definition is:

*... culture should be regarded as the set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual, and emotional features of society or a social group, and that*

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<sup>3</sup> UNESCO. 2001. *Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity*, p. 2

*it encompasses, in addition to art and literature, lifestyles, ways of living together, value systems, traditions and beliefs.*<sup>4</sup>

I have put that up on a slide – it will also be on my website for later reference.

Raymond Williams in *Keywords*<sup>5</sup> has written extensively about the word *culture* and puts it into a context that helps us define its meaning for our communities.

*Beginning as a noun of process — the culture (cultivation) of crops or rearing and breeding of animals, and by extension, the culture (active cultivation) of the human mind. The word culture- became in the late eighteenth century, especially in German and English, a noun of configuration or generalisation of the spirit, which informed the whole way of life of a distinct people.*

Culture therefore can also refer to **cultivating the spirit** of a community, and can find a useful parallel with the same root in Anglo-Saxon meaning cultivation of the land and soil, for instance, horticulture or agriculture.

The words *horticulture* and *agriculture* encompass not only growing, but nurturing and caring.

The nurturing of the communities is a realistic picture of your links with your family, extended family, workplace and community.

*Culture* you see is broader and more fulfilling than just artistic expression.

It moves on to encompass growth essential to human existence, to the cultivating, nurturing, and caring of human cultures and their spirit.

Culture also includes physical, intellectual, emotional and spiritual aspects of our lives.

So in understanding our culture and this word, we include sport, religion, recreation, leisure, work, the arts and histories, along with festivals associated with birth, death, marriage, birthdays and anniversaries, and ceremonies, literature, exhibitions and festivals – the list goes on.

But also the way we design our houses and living rooms, and use our environment.

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<sup>4</sup> This definition is in line with the conclusions of the World Conference on Cultural Policies (MONDIACULT, Mexico City, 1982), of the World Commission on Culture and Development (*Our Creative Diversity*, 1995), and of the Intergovernmental Conference on Cultural Policies for Development (Stockholm, 1998).

<sup>5</sup> Williams, R, 1981, *Culture*, Fontana, Glasgow. Page 10.

How we work with nature and how we develop our trade and industries are all part of our culture.

### ***Relationship with the community***

Today we are here to talk about you as superwoman and your relationship with others, family and community and how you can understand others and respect the differences that emerge.

We know that it is important that each member of the family relationship knows and understand **who they are**, and what they can bring to the relationship – it is a partnership.

The same applies to community relationship.

We should understand who **we** are and **then we** can appreciate and communicate with others – the partnership is about understanding and sharing – give and take.

Good times and bad. Sometimes it is rocky – sometimes smooth and beautiful.

Yet there is a fundamental problem as I see it.

Too many Pakeha New Zealanders, unlike Maori, Chinese, Fijians etc, do not know who they are you haven't really examined their culture or how that culture influences your life.

Many of us are insecure about who we are or what we are. Some of you will share that insecurity and that insecurity flows into our relationships with our family and as importantly, our communities.

You may not be confident that the music you like, the soap operas and community theatres you enjoy, the foods you eat, the clothing you wear are symbols of your own culture.

We are only beginning to recognise that we have own history which is unique, and this is mainly because people like Ann Salmon and Michael King have stimulated our thinking.

We are beginning to talk about our identity – the flag debate is part of this. We are beginning to acknowledge we have a unique sound in our music, our own visual arts, Len Lye, Don Binney, Robin White, our own composers like Gareth Farr, Douglas Lilburn, and we are beginning to recognise that we are different from other parts of the world.

I was taught English history and 1066 and all that, before being taught about New Zealand history, and therefore understanding the Treaty of Waitangi is

strange to many of my generation. Certainly I didn't learn about it at school, except that it happened in 1840.

For each of you your culture is different and each of you brings something different to the family and community.

This is extremely important. We can celebrate difference especially when we understand that difference and respect it.

Your cultures, and the communities around them are as distinct as your finger prints.

## **How do you understand your culture**

There is not time in a speech to do a cultural analysis for you each, but this is a fun exercise and I would encourage you to do it with your families.

Use the headings, myths or histories, ideologies, values and then look at the rituals that express those. On my website there is a speech I gave on Waitangi day that could take you on my voyage. You can do the same task.

When you understand your culture you can then share that culture with others, but as important you can use that knowledge to design a culture.

You can design your homes to reflect your cultures, you can design your social functions to celebrate your cultures and you can inspire you families by making your cultures innovative and creative.

## **How can you create your own cultures**

We all gravitate to places where the culture enables us to fit in and feel safe.

We make our homes comfortable and we seek places to meet our friends where we feel equally comfortable.

Think about the places where you feel most "at home", and where you are most at one with yourself, and then think about why these places reflect your culture.

Think about the people we feel comfortable with. I love the way we look at ourselves as New Zealand. The values that make up our cultures are so different from United States or England.

Sir Edmund Hillary's himself noted that..

*"...in some ways I believe I epitomise the average New Zealander: I have modest abilities, I combine these with a good deal of determination, and I rather like to succeed<sup>6</sup>."*

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<sup>6</sup> Sir Edmund Hillary [www.nzedge.com](http://www.nzedge.com)

### ***The rituals that express our culture***

One of the most important ways to define culture is through looking at the rituals.

- The way you dress –
- The way you have your home and garden -
- The way you set up your desk –
- The way you may watch TV with your meal on your lap -
- The way we sit at a table for formal meals
- The way you talk to your children
- Your language.

We eat, – English food, Indian, Italian, Mexican and Chinese food.

Is the barbeque or the hangi the way you entertain – or do you have formal dinners in a formal dining room?

Rice and pasta are now days more frequently at our table than potatoes. Potatoes are too much like hard work!

I hope you are still thinking about yourselves. What is your culture – what are your myths, ideologies and values?

### ***Spark and dynamics of culture***

Understanding culture is also important as you nurture and bring up your children.

This is because within a living culture is the spark of innovation and the spark for its development.

You may want to create a culture of learning and experimenting for your children in your home, and hopefully in their schools.

One more quotation to remind you of what is happening in your community.

We should note that:

*...all cultures are in a state of flux, driven by both internal and external forces. These forces may be accommodating, harmonious, benign and based on voluntary actions, or they may be involuntary, the result of violent conflict, force, domination and the exercise of illegitimate power<sup>7</sup>*

We should also note that:

*Although culture and development are inextricably linked, it is culture*

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<sup>7</sup> De Cuellar, Javier Perez. *Our Creative Diversity* – Unesco Publishing 1995. ISBN Unesco 92-3-103423-5

*that plays the crucial role because it 'is the sum total of original solutions that a group of human beings invent to adapt to their natural and social environment'<sup>8</sup>".*

There must be a **creative spark** for sustainable development, the spark that encourages us to change and develop.

Original thought is that spark and when added to imagination and innovation enables our cultures to grow and move forward.

That spark is essential and involves society taking risks, making mistakes, experimenting and then developing. Creating this spark is one of the tasks of Superwoman in your family.

Many communities in seeking stability and yearn for the past. They try to create communities that are perceived to be safe, secure and conservative.

This kind of New Zealand will not find original solutions for your family.

## **Isolation and support**

One of the reasons I have spent time with you on understanding your culture is because I want you to understand how you can make your lives easier and more comfortable and how you can enhance your own wellbeing.

I think we as women often feel that we don't belong anywhere and we don't have enough places where we can go and hang out.

We feel isolated and we seek support.

This is where Plunket comes in. You are one of the groups that can create alternative community cultures that work for your members and the mothers in your area.

I have been increasingly interested in a concept that is called the third place.

## **Third Place**

Increasingly it is being acknowledged that people need to find places to go and to feel comfortable - that are not their home or their work. These places are increasingly called the Third Place.

The term "third place" is also being used by people working on resiliency for young people.

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<sup>8</sup> De Varine, Huues, *La Culture des Autres*, Paris, Seuil, 1976

Young people who “spring back” after trauma – have managed to do have a place to go that is not school or family. Older people who are engaging in the community also need a place to go in addition to their own homes.

For your well-being I am suggesting that you need a Third Place, somewhere that is just yours – somewhere where you can meet with friends and feel comfortable. Most third places are not attended by both husband and wife or partner. They are places you go to have time **as you**.

I suggest that most women have always had a third place. It was the village well, the corner store, and the local church. What has happened to Superwoman is that she hasn’t enough time for her third place.

I pick up my granddaughter from school twice a week. I watch the mothers, and a few fathers. School breaks up at 3pm, but many of the parents get there early. This is a third place for them. I overhear the conversations sometimes. Wide ranging and personal.

Do you have a third place?

The Third places today are different, but they still are places where you can be yourself. Most of these third places have established their own culture.

In them you feel comfortable. How many of you have a third place?

Is it the gym, the playground, the movies, a friends place for coffee or tea.

As I have said several times in this speech, I am concerned that we haven’t yet found a balance.

We haven’t all established **wellbeing** and this is the reason so many of you have periods of depression and “dis ease”. You have times when you really want – as Next Magazine puts it – **me time**.

Isolation and loneliness are factors that hinder cultural well-being and can be cured – yes I think cured is the word. If you find your third place and if you haven’t got one, create it.

This speech, I hope, has taught you about understanding your culture. It is now going to suggest that you make spaces that reflect cultural wellbeing.

Today I really want to emphasise the importance of the third place for all of you.

This third place needs to be non-judgemental, safe, non-threatening, environmentally comfortable, emotionally supportive, a place where you can be calm, a place where you can discuss issues without tension and a place where you can learn. Third places also often have food.

For me Playcentre and adult education classes provided my third place. The golf club now fills that need.

All superwomen need a third place in modern society, New Zealand society,

I think we need to create more and new Third places.

We have closed schools, shut up corner stores, stopped using community halls and have a political environment that criticises community adult education classes in cake decorating, weaving and pottery. In my parenting days they provided me with a third place.

Maybe this is where Plunket and Parent Centres have a role, where your parent groups and your Plunket rooms come in.

Maybe you should be aggressively providing third places for mothers. I know some of you do and when I visited Brooklyn Plunket, the community centre drop in place also housed the Plunket rooms. The partnership was just great.

So here is a further concept to support you as you think about your life and use of time.

## **You and your culture**

I think you can work to establish your cultural wellbeing, but to do that you also need to understand how to read the places and environments in your community.

Read, see, listen and accept.

You then need to work out how to make those communities more accepting, tolerant and welcoming.

Again I stress that culture is our histories, myths, ideologies, values and the ritual around them.

Look at the daily routines in your home and the way you can influence the rituals in the home.

Do you have dinner in front of the television? Do you have special family meetings? Do you have barbeques together with relatives and friends? How have you placed the furniture in your house – does it encourage comfort and communication?

Is your home – “you” or is it designed to reflect someone else? These things are important.

They are also important for your work environment.

How does the interaction at work, work for you? What is the work culture and how do you fit in that culture? Is the physical environment comfortable and welcoming?

You can influence your work culture by reading it and exploring ways to change the places of desks, the times of tea breaks and the dynamics thus making yourself culturally safe and comfortable. Even pressured workplaces can be adapted to have positive interaction.

I am not very committed to "tidiness" for "tidiness" sake. I am committed to creating supportive, warm, casual and innovative environments.

We get too worried about external appearances – the final outcome is what we want in our homes and in our third places.

Again, comfort, safety, enjoyment and wellbeing. (Health, happiness and prosperity, remember?).

The same applies to your community organisations.

Remember the sign posts – examine the history or myths, the ideologies and values of the groups you belong to and find yourself a third place.

Don't forget your own history, your own family stories (myths), your ideologies and values which are so important to define your personal cultural inheritance.

Remember again the spark of human development. That it is culture that encourages that spark.

New Zealanders are creative, innovative and I think this comes from interaction between cultures.

Learning and growing and interacting.

Learning from diversity and learning from each other while encouraging a life that is interactive and caring.

## **Now back to the superwoman**

So to finish this talk I wish to return to you as superwoman.

It really worries me that so many of you are stressed, depressed and only coping because you are working at home and a job 70 hours a week or more!!

I am concerned that you are not concentrating on your well-being. If you can get your well-being right, I suggest you will then be able to get the wellbeing of your family and community right.

Well-being is "health, happiness and prosperity".

Prosperity doesn't mean wealth in money terms – it can mean wealth in social, environmental and cultural terms.

Think about this and your lives.

### ***Enjoy your children and their cultures***

In closing I also want to discuss your children. I see in the programme for this conference there are lots of sessions about your families. I want you to enjoy them. Fun and happiness are important.

I was delighted by a comment from one of the mothers I visited with Sarah Priday on my day with the Plunket round.

This mother was in a comfortable home – there were toys and books around. She noted that this time she was enjoying the second baby and she was determined to enjoy her.

Perfection does not have to be just keeping the house tidy. Perfection can be spending quality time and being happy and healthy.

Think about the cultures in which you work and play. Think about your home culture.

Think about how you can make your life more balanced.

In this paper I am suggesting that this can happen if you analyse your social, environmental and cultural wellbeing. I haven't added economic to this mix – why?

Because we are too worried about money. It is time to worry about ourselves.

I travel a lot and I have been working in South Africa and Australia. I have also travelled extensively in Asia.

I am convinced that wealth does not provide happiness. Oh yes it can help but get the other things that are as important.

### ***Conclusion***

So in conclusion. Cultural wellbeing is the key, in my opinion to health, happiness and prosperity.

Culture and cultural wellbeing can produce the spark of development that is creativity, and creativity is linked to the nature of culture and cultural development, thus is an outcome of cultural well-being for family, work and your community.

I hope this talk has enlightened you and I hope you will think about what I have been saying.

I do believe that understanding your own culture, helps you to understand others and other peoples culture.