

**SPEECH FOR GWEN CHERNE**  
**GALLIPOLI SCHOLARSHIP FUND**  
**MERRYLANDS RSL**  
**THURSDAY 04 MAY 2023**  
**WORD COUNT: 1180 (Approx 9:00 MINS)**

Good afternoon/morning, my name is Gwen Cherne, I am the Veteran Family Advocate Commissioner, and I'm so pleased to be with you today to award the Gallipoli Scholars for 2023.

These scholarships honour our past, while also looking towards a promising future.

Today we celebrate both.

Before I go on, I would like to acknowledge the traditional owners of this land where we meet.

For more than 20,000 years, Sydney was home to the Gadigal people of the Eora Nation.

For countless generations they tended to and cared for this land.

I hope you will join me in acknowledging and paying respect to their elders, past, present and emerging.

And I would like to extend that respect to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who join us today.

I would also like to acknowledge the current and ex-serving members of the Australian Defence Force (ADF) with us today. As the granddaughter, daughter, niece, cousin, mother, partner and widow of veterans, I know only too well the sacrifices you make in the service of our nation and I thank you for your service.

And I especially acknowledge the families of ADF personnel and veterans – it is the husbands, wives, children and parents of our defence personnel that are the true supporters not only of their loved ones, but also of the ADF. Thank you for your service, and for the sacrifices you make.

Thank you to all our distinguished guests who are with us today.

I also want to thank Merrylands RSL for hosting today's event.

You've been a champion of the scholarships for more than 25 years – since they were founded in 1996.

My thanks also to RSL, ex-service organisations, the Australian Defence Force and all the foundations and corporate sponsors who make these awards possible.

Your support changes lives.

And finally, thank you to the Department of Veterans' Affairs for your ongoing support.

A particular acknowledgement and thank you to Major General Arthur Fittock, who is with us today, and was the Repatriation Commissioner in 1996 who first offered support to the Gallipoli scholarships on their inception. I sit on the Repatriation Commission now and am grateful for your work and service to our community over so many years.

Lastly I want to thank a mentor and friend of mine Mike Smith – Chair of the GSF Board who has been a beacon of light for me and a wonderful leader to ensure these scholarships continue to be possible for all of you and for many years to come.

Thank you, all.

It is fitting that we meet today, so soon after Anzac Day – a time when we pause to remember all those who served Australia.

From the shores of Gallipoli, to the ridges of Kokoda and the jungles of Vietnam, through to the desert passes of Iraq and Afghanistan, successive generations have answered our nation's call.

And they played a role in shaping modern Australia.

Through their dedication and service, they showed we are a nation who faces adversity, who forges forward despite the odds.

We're a nation who stands by our mates, and stands up for the less fortunate.

We are brave and bold and daring.

This is the legacy of our veterans, and today we come together in that same tradition.

We are here to celebrate all you have achieved, and to look forward to a future where you will play a part in shaping the Australia of tomorrow.

Today we are awarding 35 Gallipoli Scholarships – a record number.

I've read through each of your accomplishments, and you've all done remarkable things.

From dedicating your time to community causes, overcoming natural disasters, volunteering in rural Australia, founding a youth council to give young people a voice in local government, right through to competing in professional sport, all while maintaining outstanding grades.

You've all achieved so much.

Each and every one of you should stand tall.

It has also been equally astounding to read about the depth of service in each of your families.

Gathered today we have descendants of veterans from every major conflict Australia has participated in, from the Bore War to Afghanistan.

Some families even boast multiple generations of service.

Your families made a great contribution to our nation, and you should be proud of their service. Service to this nation comes in many forms. Some of your families did this by wearing a uniform and some have done it without wearing one.

In my role as Veteran Family Advocate Commissioner, I often see the positive and the negative impact a person's service can have on their family.

Over the course of a Defence career both the veteran and the family has amazing experiences and opportunities – that may not have been open to them had they not been a Defence family.

But our veteran families also can have added financial, emotional or psychological burdens to overcome.

Scholarships, like those we are awarding today, are recognition of the challenges families face.

They are designed to provide financial security to pursue your studies and achieve the goals you've set for yourself.

An education is one of the greatest gifts we can receive. I started a school for children from low-income immigrant families in one of the roughest neighborhoods of NYC – because I realised...

With an education you can build a future that is brighter than your past.

With an education you can elevate yourself based on your merits, not your circumstances.

For the socially disadvantaged, minority groups, or those up against inter-generation dispossession, education levels the playing field. Education is something that cannot be taken away from us, undermined or dismissed. It is ours. The Jesuits taught me in my university journey that as long as I learned to love learning, I could do learn to do anything.

I am so pleased to see eight of these scholarships going to descendants of First Nations Veterans.

People who stood up to fight for a nation that for so long failed to fight for them.

Today goes a small way towards balancing the scale.

With the skills and knowledge you will gain through your study, you will be on a path not only to improve yourself, but Australia as a whole.

I know many of you aspire to take what you'll learn and return to your communities.

I know many of you undertaking medical degrees plan to work in the remote corners of Australia, where those services are sorely needed.

I know many of you studying law, plan to offer legal services to the disadvantaged.

And then there are those among you who want to teach, or champion land rights or humanitarian causes.

This is the very essence of the Anzac spirit that we cherish and celebrate – looking out for your mates, standing up for those who do not have access to the opportunities we have been afforded.

I commend you all.

The Gallipoli Scholarship Fund's motto is: 'Their sacrifice, your future.'

Today we stand here only because of those who have gone before.

For more than 100 years, Australians have served, putting themselves second to secure the life we enjoy now.

While many decades have passed, and many of those veterans are no longer with us, we still stand steeped in the legacy of their sacrifices.

Now we hand the torch they carried to you.

You will become the next generation of doctors and teachers, of engineers and artists, of lawyers and computer scientists.

As you look to forge your careers I want to give you a piece of advice. Find mentors – you will need them. They will help you and they will help you keep yourself accountable. Mike Smith – Chair of this GSF board was my boss a long time ago. He has been a mentor, a friend and a light in some difficult moments of my life. He also taught me a thing or two about getting things done in this country.

But also – and even more importantly connect with the other scholarship recipients here today. Make networks with your peers. Keep in touch on professional social media sites, the people in this room, other students in your course work at school, these are the people who will help connect you to jobs and other opportunities over the entirety of your career. Do not underestimate the importance of connecting and networking with your peers.

Today we look to a future that you will shape.

To build a better Australia, that will benefit the lives of those yet to be born.

Just as the veterans that went before us did.

As I see it, opportunity is Gallipoli Scholarship Funds gift to you, what you do with it is your gift to the Gallipoli Scholarship Fund and those who sacrificed so much for our nation.

In a moment, you will each be awarded your scholarships.

I know you will approach your studies with the same dedication and diligence you have already shown.

And when you leave here, I invite you to carry the memory of your family and their service in your heart.

Remember and honour those sacrifices of the past, but keep your eyes focused on the future and the difference you will make.

Many of those who have come before us have worn a uniform. While I never have, the best thing I ever did was learn how to serve in my own way. I learned a long time ago that life of service is certainly a life worth living.

Today you forge a new link in an unbroken chain of service, handed down from generation to generation.

Service that has, and will, build a stronger nation for all those who call Australia home.

I know you will do us proud.

I want to leave you with my favourite quote from Pedro Arrupe, that has kept me true to my purpose:

Nothing is more practical than falling in love in a quite absolute final way.

What you are in love with,  
what seizes your imagination,  
will affect everything.

It will decide what will get you out of bed in the morning,  
what you do with your evenings,  
how you spend your weekend,  
what you read, who you know,  
what breaks your heart,  
and what amazes you with joy and gratitude.

Fall in love,  
stay in love,  
and it will decide everything.

Thank you and congratulations.