Commemoration for Levinia Crooks AM

ASHM Conference. Monday Plenary November 6th 2017

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Good morning

I would like to acknowledge the Traditional **Custodians** of this Land and the **Elders** Past and Present. I would also like to acknowledge that we do not yet have a Treaty with the First Peoples of this country.

I would like also to acknowledge Levinia's **mother**, Mrs Judy Jackson and Levinia's **close friend** Mr Richard D'Apice who are **both** here at this morning's plenary.

It's an **honour** to have been invited to give this Commemoration for Levinia Crooks.

But in **doing** so I am keenly aware that I will be **contravening** one of the chief rules of engagement with Levinia- which was to **NOT** sing her praises, or make a fuss of her - because that would make her feel **very** uncomfortable. At the **root** of this discomfort, I believe, was her enduring **modesty**, which I think you can see here in this photo of her taken in 2015 following a lecture she gave at a scientific meeting in **Sri Lanka.**

It was both her **modesty *and*** her **willpower** that produced her **challenging mandate** that **after** her death, there was to be **no funeral or memorial service** in her **honour**. **Thereby** Levinia has challenged us to come to **terms** with her loss in an **unconventional** way, **without** a funeral, which is **not** easy.

Levinia was **born** in NSW in November 1960 and was **the** only child of her parents, Judy and David. She attended **Lilli Pilli** primary school and then went on to **Caringbah High School**. Judy recounted to me that when Levinia was **aged 4**, each weeknight she would **drag** her little cane chair over to the television to watch **Professor Julius Sumner Miller's** program **"Why is it so?"** This was an **early sign** of her **curious** mind and her **great love** of **learning**, both of which saw her excelling at school.

Levinia attended the **University of Wollongong** where she undertook a **Bachelor of Arts** degree majoring with Honours in **psychology**. Later, in **2013** she received an **MBA** from the University of New England.

In **2008** she was appointed a Member of the Order of Australia (AM) in recognition of her service in the area of HIV and AIDS. Here she is receiving the order with Dame Marie Bashir.

Subsequently, Levinia was awarded **Adjunct** Associate Professorships at **Latrobe** University and the **University** of New South Wales and I remember having to **badger** her to put her Adjunct **positions** on her email signature and **thankfully**, as you can see here, she **finally** capitulated, as you can see here.

Following her graduation from the University of Wollongong in 1984, Levinia worked at the Psychology Department at the University and stayed there until 1990. And the **Psychology** Department was **very fortunate** for they had landed an **incredibly** intelligent, **hard** working young woman who was

strongly committed to equity and social justice, was a highly **strategic** thinker with a **formidable** memory and an **extraordinary** capacity to understand and explain technical details. And here is a portrait of her from that time as a young woman.

During her **six years** at the University Levinia took on and managed the Wollongong AIDS Research Project Here is a photo of Levinia at the 5th International conference on AIDS in Montreal in 1989 beside a poster of her work from University of Wollongong.

Then for **nine years** during the 1990s, Levinia held a **number** of positions in NSW working in the area of HIV/AIDS with both **community** organisations and the **State Government**. During this time she served as Vice-President of **AFAO**, President of **ACON** and **President** of the Bobby Goldsmith Foundation.

In this **photo** from this **period**, what I **believe** you can see here are several of Levinia's **defining features**: her **kindness**, her **light touch** when it came to offering consolation or support and her **natural activism**- in this photo **she** is the one taking action – she's on the phone, sorting something out- heaven's know what- all the while being tender and very present to her friend or perhaps, co-worker in the photo.

Here she is again with a **mischievous** look – my **best** guess is that she has just **hatched** a plan to secure some **funding** for a new project because as you know, she always managed to pull funding out of thin air!!!

During those years she honed her skills in writing reports and policy documents, running workshops, undertaking projects and developing a **rich** knowledge of the HIV sector and the **structure** and machinations of local, State and Commonwealth Governments. **All of which** she brought to **ASHM** in **1999** along with the **respect** and **trust** of the sector.

And in the **18 years** that she worked at ASHM what she achieved was essentially **Herculean** and **impossible** to describe in the short time I have today.

Broadly, as CEO of ASHM, she contributed to national, regional and international communities by producing a huge opus of work for each of the areas of HIV, Hepatitis C, Hepatitis B and STIs.

Under her **guidance** as CEO, ASHM developed national **HIV treatment**, PEP and PrEP guidelines; it developed **s100 courses** for general practitioners in Australia; it produced **HIV educational monographs** that continue to be widely used and revised to this day. ASHM established a highly successful and respected International Division that worked with several regional countries, providing them with an International S100 prescriber course and

HIV laboratory courses. **Levinia** and her staff fostered these countries' **autonomy** by helping them to develop their **own** HIV and STI societies.

She drafted and coordinated **several** of the HIV National Strategies over the past 2 decades.

She saw ASHM host the 2007 IAS conference in Sydney and play a large role in the World AIDS Conference in Melbourne in 2014 which saw her putting together a 3 day Leadership and Mentoring course for HIV professionals in Asia and The Pacific region. Mentoring and stigma were always chief themes in Levinia's work.

Fed up with having to bring in outside companies to run the annual ASHM conferences she developed a highly successful in- house Conference Division. And here you can see her at the opening plenary of last year's ASHM conference in Adelaide with Steve Wesselingh.

ASHM went on to bring viral hepatitis and STIs into its portfolio and the **approach** that she had undertaken so **successfully** with **HIV** she applied to **ASHM's** work with viral hepatitis and STIs: **driving** national strategies, **driving** education, **workforce** development and **treatment** access. She brought leaders and stakeholders in from these new areas to help guide the

Board and the Society thus ensuring that the standard of ASHM's work across all these areas was always very high.

Levinia undertook **important** and **ambitious** work and fought **hard**, long battles, especially when ASHM brought viral hepatitis into its portfolio. But **because** she was a **champion** of human rights, she **stayed** in those fights- **not because her opponents were worthy**- but because the **fights** were **worthy** and worth **winning**.

Here is where one may **rightly** call Levinia "**commanding**" (to **wrestle** back a word that is **typically** used **only** to describe **men**). She didn't **tolerate** fools, **foolish** ideas or **wasting time** with **senseless turf wars.**

Levinia's forward thinking and energy around access to healthcare, marshalled through the work of her **remarkable ASHM staff**, were **integral** to Australia's **current international reputation** for **leading** the **world** in hepatitis C treatment access, hepatitis B diagnosis and treatment and **HIV diagnosis**, treatment and prevention.

Levinia was also **prescient**: back in **2000** she suggested that perhaps the drugs we were using for **post- exposure prophylaxis**- PEP- should be used for **pre-exposure prophylaxis**- PrEP- but she was **strongly** criticised for such an unorthodox and "**dangerous**" idea at the time, alas.

She was a **consummate professional** and treated all people equally.

She was very **generous** with her **time** and was **always** there at the end of the phone to **provide advice**, drawing on her immense corporate knowledge of the sector.

I am **very** mindful that along with her **mother** and **close friends** that Levinia's **loyal staff at ASHM are feeling her loss acutely**. They saw how hard she worked at ASHM, often arriving at work at 4 or 5 am in the morning. They were the **recipients** of her mentoring, care and **interest** in their **lives** and future career aspirations. **They worked very hard to bring about her visionary progress**. Their **respect** for Levinia matches **her respect** for **them and** the work they did **together** for nearly two decades. The ASHM staff also saw how **thoughtful and patient** Levinia was in caring for her **father**, David who **lived** with Levinia for several years prior to his **death** a few years ago.

Levinia's **personal** life was rich with friends, travel especially on trains, cooking and pursuit of fine wine and food. But she **kept** it largely private, which again reflects the **high** level of her professionalism.

In **October** last year Levinia and I went to **Nashville** for Anna Roberts' and David Wilson's wedding which was wonderful. Here is a photo of Levinia and Anna and myself at the wedding.

However we both **struggled** with downtown Nashville, **where** we were **staying** and one day we **cabbed** it **south** of Nashville to seek refuge in the **Cheekwood** Botanical Gardens and Museum. **Here,** in this photo you can see the **ever** practical and **technical** Levinia, with a **map** of the gardens, trying to work out **which path we should take**.

And **this** was one of the paths we took together that day.

Which was **just** beautiful, as you can **see**.

Levinia has accompanied so many of us down our own individual paths.

Many of us owe her a large part of our **skills**, **insights** and **successes**. I know how ***completely*** indebted **I** am to **her**.

It is **no** surprise that **commemorations** are being held all around Australia in Levinia's honour, a **fact** that would **completely** astonish her.

Levinia Crooks you were a force of nature!

The **world** could have done with another **three** or **four** hundred **years** of you!

We are **so** diminished for having **lost** you! Yet **so** rich for having **known** you!

Vale Levinia!!! Farewell!!!