



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Federation Chamber

CONSTITUENCY STATEMENTS

Osuch-Helsham, Ms Nicole

SPEECH

Monday, 28 May 2012

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Page 5815
Questioner
Speaker Leigh, Andrew, MP

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Dr LEIGH (Fraser) (10:35): During the 2010 election campaign, one of the suburbs I doorknocked was Harrison. I sent out a letter letting residents know I would be in the area and inviting people to contact me if they had any issues. Nicole Osuch-Helsham phoned me up to say that, after I had finished doorknocking, her daughter Paige would like to interview me about politics. Nicole promised to provide coffee and cake. When I arrived after an afternoon of doorknocking, a delicious cake had just come out of the oven, and eight-year-old Paige had a battery of questions. They were deeper questions than the most professional journalists had been asking on the campaign trail—things like, 'So why are you in the Labor Party rather than the Liberal Party?' The following week Paige also interviewed Liberal candidate James Milligan.

After the interview was over, I told Nicole how impressed I was by Paige, but I was also curious as to why she had invited me to drop by. It was then that Nicole told me she had been diagnosed with secondary cancer: 'not the Kylie Minogue kind of breast cancer but the Jane McGrath kind'. The cancer had come back and Nicole knew she would not be around to share the teenage years with Paige and her younger sister, Sierra. So she had quit her job and was packing all the parenting she could into the time remaining.

After I won the election, Nicole and her husband, Gavin, brought the girls along to my first speech. A few months later she arranged for me to go to Harrison School with my friend the member for Bowman. The 'two Andrews talk politics' event was a hoot. Anyone who thinks primary schoolkids are apathetic about politics needs to spend some more time in the classroom. Shortly afterwards I launched my Big Ideas competition at Harrison School. When the WIN TV crew turned up, I introduced Paige to the journalists as my youth adviser. That night I smiled as the title appeared beneath her name on the television screen.

Cancer finally claimed Nicole on 7 May 2012, aged 43. The funeral service was held after Mother's Day, so Paige and Sierra drew cards for her and placed them on the coffin. In one eulogy Nicole was described as a 'goddess'. She had established a support group for people with secondary cancers. Nicole had spent time with friends and had devoted herself to her daughters. Her closest friends and fellow goddesses, Louise Talbot and Catherine Gladman, said that Nicole managed to 'lick the plate of life clean'.

Cancer reminds us how awfully unfair life can be, but the way that Nicole lived her final years—devoted to friends and family, engaged with her community and telling jokes until the end—has a lesson for all of us. Rest in peace, Nicole Osuch-Helsham.