



Mary-Ruth Mendel, Founder of The Australian Literacy and Numeracy Foundation

Australia Day Speech – Walgett Shire Council 2009

I wish to acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the place where we come together today. I pay respect to their elders and to their culture - the oldest living culture in the world.

I am delighted to be here.

I thank the Australia Day Council of New South Wales and the Australia Day committee here in Walgett for the opportunity to celebrate Australia Day with you today. I also thank all of you for coming.

This Australia Day marks the 20th anniversary of the Australia Day Program. The Woolworth's sponsored programme originally began with 9 Australia Day Ambassadors. It has steadily grown to now take place in every state and territory across the country.

This year there will be 5,000 different locations holding similar celebrations to the one we are having here. People will be attending breakfast BBQs, having street get togethers, attending citizenship and community recognition awards ceremonies and generally having a day off to enjoy being an Aussie.

Australia Day is a time to **celebrate** and **reflect on** who we are and what we have achieved. It is also right that we **contemplate** on how we can strengthen each of our communities.

What steps will each of us decide to take to add strength to our communities?

We have plenty to celebrate.

Our nation has many substantial achievements.

During the past 200 years or so we have gone from a collection of convict colonies to a modern and vibrant society which embraces democratic principles and a "fair go" attitude.

We have produced world leaders in agriculture, science, engineering, medicine, business and the arts.

We punch above our weight on the international stage in trade and sport.

We not only have the priceless gift of the oldest living culture but a landform of great diversity and beauty sculptured over millions of years.

Our country is amongst the most desirable countries to live in the world.

What also makes the place so desirable is the range of Aussie traits. We all probably have our favourite.

My favourite is the way we talk and communicate with each other.

Being a speech pathologist and the chair of The Australian Literacy and Numeracy Foundation, I am interested in how well we talk, read and write!

My husband, Julius, is a barrister – talking goes with the territory!

I mention this because the way people commonly talk is a window into their community.

Don't the words and phrases that we choose to use tell us something about the influences on our lives?

Each year the Macquarie Dictionary on line resource runs a competition to identify the new words and phrases that have crept into our Australian language during the year.

What do these new words and phrases tell us about ourselves? How does the way we talk reflect what is going on in our time right now?

In 2007 the winner was:

“pod slurping “,

which means the process of “Downloading” large quantities of data to “**MP3 players**” (the latest version of the record player) or “**memory sticks**” (an electronic filing cabinet the size of a stick of chewing gum).

The people's choice was -

“password fatigue” –

which means that we have too many passwords to remember.

In 2008 there are 85 new words and phrases up for consideration. The winner will be announced the first week of February.

In America the 2008 Word of the Year is **hypermiling** (attempting to maximize petrol mileage by making fuel-conserving adjustments to one's car and one's driving techniques).

Any **hypermilers** amongst you today?

These are some of the contenders for the Australian word of the year.

Let me attempt to put the words into a little story to help illustrate.

“It was the night before Australia Day.

*The **mockbuster** I was watching (i.e. a low budget movie) was boring so I logged on to the **Click and Mortar** site (i.e. is a company which operates on line and offline. It has a web site and a physical store) to do some **shwapping** (i.e. a combination of shopping and swapping on an online exchange site).*

*My **Wii shoulder** was killing me (i.e. a painful shoulder from excessive playing of virtual computer games.)*

*“Hmm,” I say to myself. I am going to give in to my **textaholic** tendencies (a person who excessively texts) and tell my **BFF** (Best Friend Forever) about the **frenamy** (a person who pretends to be a friend but is really an enemy) who said I was a **salad dodger** (an overweight person).*

A crisis occurs though.

My mobile phone doesn't work!

*I spin out into a **nomophobic** attack (i.e. the state of anxiety aroused from no mobile phone contact) and have to calm myself by visualising a selection of **global commons** (i.e. is parts of the world not owned by a particular person or state such as the oceans, atmosphere, outer space).*

*As my nerves settle, I think about the **Generation Z** – all those born in the 2000's. (they are characterised by being at ease with computers, online and mobile communication. They can “multi task” and already they influence their **helicopter parents'** purchasing decisions.)*

*“Yes” I think to myself, Australia will be in good hands when as a “**grey nomad**” I head north to the sunshine during the “**granny season**” (winter time when older people or grey nomads head north in campervans).*

*I am confident that young Australians will creatively use the **dub a dub dub** (2008 speak for the 3 w's of the world wide web).*

*They will be capable **Cyberathletes** who will manage complex concepts ranging from **water foot prints** (how much water is used by a country, business or individual) through to **data smog** (too much electronic information), **infomania** (people who put aside a job to concentrate on incoming emails or text messages), **climate canaries** (places, plants and*

animals that point to climate change) and **sugging** (the use of market research when in fact someone is really trying to sell you something).

This may sound like a lot of “**flap doodle**” to you – (a word from 1820 (that means “a lot of nonsense”) but it brings you up to date with the latest lingo.

Now for the short version of the story, without the definitions included.

The short story goes like this.....

“It was the night before Australia Day.

*The **mockbuster** I was watching was boring so I logged on to the **Click and Mortar** site to do some **shwapping**. My **Wii shoulder** was killing me.*

*“Hmm,” I say to myself. I am going to give in to my **textaholic** tendencies and tell my **BFF** about the **frenamy** who said I was a **salad dodger**.*

A crisis occurs though.

My mobile phone doesn't work!

*I spin out into a **nomophobic** attack and have to calm myself by visualising a selection of **global commons**.*

*As my nerves settle I think about the **Generation Z**. They can multi task and already they influence their **helicopter parents** purchasing decisions.*

*“Yes” I think to myself, “Australia will be in good hands when as a grey nomad I head north to the sunshine during the **granny season**.*

*I am confident that young Australians will creatively use the **dub a dub dub**.*

*They will be capable **Cyberathletes** who will manage complex concepts ranging from **water foot prints** through to **data smog**, **infomania**, **climate canaries** and **sugging**.”*

In just the one year we have so many new words that have been added to the Australian Vocabulary. They represent complex concepts associated with sophisticated technology and of social change.

If nothing else they ensure that good old-fashioned talking isn't underrated or ignored.

Australians are known for their easy style of talking:

- Of having a chat over a cuppa or in the, supermarket aisle,
- Of debating at meetings, or

- Socializing at get togethers (such as today)...

This brings me to another Australian quality- that of caring.

Caring for one another is often embodied in the questions we readily ask one another:

“How you going?” “

“Where are you off to?”

“How’s Tom getting on?”

“What can I do to help?”

Our willingness to talk about and to each other, to ask questions and to listen to the answers has created a communication style that is distinctly Australian; a style that is worth celebrating.

Taking the time to talk franking about the hard issues and to problem solve in groups has stood us in good stead in the past. It will do so again during the predicted uncertain times ahead.

On Australia Day, 2009, I celebrate our great tradition of talking.

I congratulate the nominees here today who are receiving recognition for their community contributions.

They are being recognised because their words have been matched by their actions.

They have demonstrated that words with actions strengthen a community.

In other words, when the talking is done it is time to take the steps that contribute to the strengthening of our communities and of our nation.

Julius and I wish you an enjoyable Australia Day and a strong and positive 2009.

Thank you

