

BEYOND 'THAT'S SO GAY' BOOK LAUNCH -
A MAGIC NIGHT

Of all the milestones that would signal to me that my book was real, one of the more unlikely ones was my speech at the official launch of *Beyond 'That's So Gay': Challenging Homophobia in Australian Schools*. I could have chosen getting the news of being published, submitting the final manuscript or receiving my actual author copies of my book. Yet then again, it's not always a matter of choice.

In many ways it should not have been so surprising. Practicing what I would say at my book launch actually helped keep me going when I doubted my manuscript would ever see the light of day. In the shower, lying in bed or between bouts of writing and editing, these speeches took place in 2004 when I was first planning the book, 2006 when I was deep into writing it and 2008 when I was restructuring and editing it.

Therefore I was overcome with more emotion than I'd expected on the evening of Thursday, 18th February 2010. Around 75 colleagues, family, friends and new friends would join me on the rooftop of City Village in Melbourne's CBD.



I was lucky enough to have Deb Holder (www.celebratingyourlife.com.au) as an MC to set the tone, mood and scene for the night. Deb read out a letter from Victoria's Minister for Education, the Hon. Bronwyn Pike MP, apologising for not being able to be there and speaking to the importance of challenging homophobia work in schools. (See Educn Min letter).

Deb would then introduce Tasmania's Rodney Croome, recently named

BEYOND 'THAT'S SO GAY'
A National Challenging Homophobia Tour
Book Launch



as one of SameSame's 25 Most Influential Gay and Lesbian Australians and, in my opinion, one of the greatest LGBT orators I have observed. Rodney spoke to the impact of my work in Australian schools: www.rodneycroome.id.au/other_more?id=3148_0_2_0_M14 When Deb asked for me to send through a biography of myself, I sent two. Not one to want to compromise her own style, I sent through a shorter bio and a longer bio in case Deb wanted to finesse it herself. I heard Deb start reading the longer bio, and listened with interest. How would she edit it? The dread washed over me. She had not edited it; she was reading the WHOLE thing. (See Daniel Witthaus Bio).



Hearing my whole “career” read out set my head spinning. Thirteen years of work and five years of creating a publishable book flashed before my eyes. As I walked up to the microphone I expected I would be reading exclusively from my notes. I read the first sentence of my speech three times as I walked, pausing before I started: *“Well now I know what it’s like to be on ‘This Is Your Life’, thanks Deb. Rodney, I should know by now how tough it is to follow you. My thanks for your words.”*

I began my speech. The words that I feared I would not remember came flooding out. Three pages of words continued to come to me. I glanced occasionally at my notes more to steady my balance and check I had not gone off on one of my customary tangents. I paused, feeling that time slowed. I looked out across a large crowd of mostly familiar faces who were either sitting or standing, relaxed and seemingly engaged. The air conditioner on the top floor that



threatened to drown out the speeches only 30 minutes earlier was now at an almost inaudible hum. (See Book launch speech)



As I reluctantly sat down to sign books (“are people really going to stand in a line for me to sign a book?”) I was struck by the openness of people to share their experiences and hopes for the book’s impact on schools. Family and friends said they had never realised how much I had done so far. One young man approached me and thanked me for the launch: *“Tonight it did not feel like a book launch, it felt like I was a part of something special. I have not felt like I was a part of something, a community, for years. It was an honour to be here. Thank-you Daniel.”*

As I lay my head on my pillow that night, I felt the rarest of moments of complete satisfaction and contentment. The voices in my head were quiet. I could not have asked for a more magical night.

(N.B. More extensive photos from the book launch can be viewed as part of the Facebook group: Beyond ‘That’s So Gay’ The Book)

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