

**Mrs Mary Wagner's speech presented at  
St Brigid's Day lunch,  
the Irish Club Hotel Toowoomba,  
Saturday 8 February 2008.**

I am honoured to be here today at your invitation to speak at the celebration of the life of St. Brigid. After reading about St. Brigid's life the only thing I seem to have in common with her is that we were both brought up on a dairy farm!

Aileen asked me to speak on the ups and downs of everyday life. I once read a great quote by the American Theologian, Charles Swindoll entitled "Attitude."

"The longer I live, the more I realize the impact of attitude on life. Attitude to me is more important than facts - It is more important than the past - than education - than money - than circumstances, than failures, than success than, what other people think, say or do. It is more important than appearance, gift or skill. Attitude will make or break a company - a church - a home."

These well worn words may be from another time but remain very relevant today. How our life unfolds will not only have a lot to do with our jobs or careers but with the manner in which we approach the circumstances in which we find ourselves.

It will be our attitude that will determine our lives.

I have found life as enjoyable and fun-filled as it is challenging. I am sure success in life is of one's own making. I consider the secret to having the right attitude involves commitment to three essential beliefs.

Firstly, life is yours to be had. You have the right, indeed the obligation to live life to the fullest.

Secondly, in tough times you must always look to turn negatives into positives.

Thirdly, to achieve your goals, particularly the significant ones, you need to be measured in their setting and then unshakeably determined in execution.

My life story is a simple one, with no sense of luxury. I grew up on a dairy farm outside Warwick with two wonderful parents, two older brothers and a younger sister. My childhood years evolved around milking cows, riding a horse to and from a one teacher school of thirty students and helping with household chores. Any spare time I had was spent in an old shed making things with timber.

Such was my existence until I was ten. I then made the grand step of travelling into Warwick for my secondary schooling as a boarder. I was only allowed home one weekend a month. My parents owned a 1927 Chev and they would travel into Warwick to collect me.

That was their only trip to town each month, which was just as well, given that in those years of war, each owner of a vehicle was only allotted a small number of coupons to purchase petrol. We went to church once a month and that was our social outing. Everyone took a picnic lunch and many longstanding friendships were made as a result. It was a really big occasion to have visitors to our home and, upon hearing that someone was to visit, many hours were spent in preparation to ensure the house was immaculate in presentation and the afternoon tea second to none in the district.

At the age of fifteen, after three years of secondary education in Warwick, my parents made the momentous decision to send me to All Hallows, in Brisbane as a boarder. This required a great deal of commitment on their part and I am forever appreciative of the sacrifice they made to bring this to fruition.

My attendance at All Hallows, and all of the new experiences that it brought even down to having to travel to Brisbane on my own, this I had never done before, and the handling of the small amount of money that I needed for emergencies, opened a new world for me. With my new life circumstances, I quickly gained an appreciation that what I did with my life was up to me and I determined that I would live it to the full.

In this respect I urge you all here today, especially the ladies, to seek out new opportunities and make every day count. Women can do anything they set their mind to. In today's society women are no longer the doormats they were years ago and the opportunities are endless.

Never take for granted the importance of your role in making the world a better place. Never stop asking how you can contribute meaningfully, to achieve a higher standard of excellence.

After finishing my schooling, I trained as a registered nurse at the Mater Hospital in Brisbane. In 1956 I moved to Toowoomba. This is where I met and married my husband, Henry. It was here I became the mother of eight children.

The years when I had a young family marked my time of learning to turn challenges to success. I pondered how I could be the best mother. How would my husband and I give these eight children a good home life and an education that would equip them to meet the challenges they may face in the future?

In the early years I committed to raising my energetic and growing family. When the youngest was four years old, I recommenced my nursing career on a full time basis but at night. Working at night was the best way for Henry and I to ensure that one of us was with the children at all times.

For thirteen years, I worked full-time night duty at a hospital that cared for one hundred aged men from all walks of life, all of whom had many stories to tell, some inspiring some

devastating. This for me was a very positive experience, teaching me so much about life and all it can give.

Raising eight children was an expensive exercise. As they grew into teenagers, the demand for fashionable outfits for dances, school events and social outings was great and I found myself using the creative skills I had developed in the family shed in my childhood years to my best advantage. I became quite proficient at whipping up an outfit for a special occasion for my three daughters. I entered and won the R.A.Q. Darling Downs Designer awards. I was rather excited about this as I was self taught and there was an impressive array of qualified competitors, some of whom boasted an enviable reputation in the world of fashion design, but perhaps the most satisfying consequence of this win, however, was the clear message my children received at a very impressionable stage of their lives that hard work, commitment, and having the right attitude brings results.

Today I am the mother of eight, self motivated, educated, well adjusted, passionate and successful Australians. I am proud of each one of them and all they achieve. They have also given me thirty grandchildren who had added a new dimension to my life and from whom I have learnt so much.

With the children growing up and leaving home, so began the next stage of my life during which I realized that to achieve I would need to take measured decisions, with vision and determination.

In 1986, Henry and I began the company that is now Wagners. We started that company with six employees, a vision of what our company could be and a determination to succeed. Through the many challenges and successes of the last years we have held to that vision.

Today, Wagners employs a staff of eight hundred and ninety in Queensland and globally. Today these employees are beneficiaries of my family's vision and determination to build something that will endure.

I am proud that our company has its headquarters in Toowoomba. Having travelled the world, I still believe Toowoomba is the best place to live. This fabulous city has provided my family with a wonderful home and presented me with many opportunities to contribute to the community, something about which I feel passionate.

Whilst the children were young, my community work revolved around school related initiatives which were very satisfying. I have found my twenty year membership of Zonta to be extremely rewarding. More recently I have enjoyed the opportunity to sponsor two refugee families from Sudan and have watched with delight, as they have successfully integrated into the Toowoomba community. I am chair of the National Carriage Factory Campaign, which will see the only working museum in the world, the Cobb and Co museum, celebrate and preserve many of our heritage trades. I continue as a longstanding Board member of Lourdes Aged care facility, providing accommodation, care and support to many of our older community members.

As I close I would like to congratulate members of this audience on all they have achieved in their life so far and acknowledge that your achievements have helped shape the world in which the younger generation will live. Like St. Brigid in 600 you are the role models of 2008 . Some of the great achievements of this country have been accomplished by women. Women must have ambition and push the boundaries but always remain feminine and act in a ladylike manner.

Since I began with an extract from Charles Swindoll's quote "Attitude" I will conclude with its closing words:-

"I am convinced that life is 10% what happens to me and 90% how I react to it."

Thank you