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MACQUARIE UNIVERSITY

SIRIUS

EMERITUS PROFESSOR DI YERBURY AO

Justice Michael Kirby AC CMG

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I can still remember the meeting of the Selection Committee which chose Di Yerbury as the recommended candidate for Vice-Chancellor. We had three outstanding possibilities. Any one of them would have been brilliant. Two of the three were external candidates whose career path was not the ordinary one for Australian Vice-Chancellors. Di Yerbury was one of these. Though an academic, she had pursued a career in federal departments and agencies.

She came into the room in a striking outfit of blue and green. Silly old mind kept saying "blue and green should not be seen". But it was quickly apparent, that this was a challenger of orthodoxy and a top person, intellect, leader.

Once appointed, Di Yerbury made it her business to meet everyone and not just the movers and shakers at Macquarie. She always added personal touches. She arranged events to celebrate excellence and achievement and to involve spouses and partners. She was generous in praise of others. She filled the University with artworks. Now, the same orthodoxy often popped up in me. Our

taste in paintings and sculpture was completely different. When I would see her latest presentation on a University wall, I would remember Oscar Wilde's deathbed description of the hotel wallpaper: "one of us has to go". As with Oscar, so with me. In the end, it was I that went. But not until after a most creative and memorable partnership in the Council and affairs of Macquarie.

Di Yerbury's insistence on excellence was reflected in the introduction of University Medals. Her generosity to others was shown in the quick recognition of the founders and early academic staff of the University. Her love of art and the Macquarie environment is seen everywhere. I was privileged to be involved in ceremonies that honoured Australian artists: Margaret Olley, James Gleeson, Peter Weir and many others.

Di Yerbury is utterly without irrational discrimination. It was she who introduced me to Bob Bellear. How proud I am that Macquarie made him, the only Aboriginal yet to become a judge in Australia, an Honorary Doctor.

She hated discrimination against women. All her life, she has carried the extra weights of being a woman leader. She was the first woman Vice-Chancellor in Australia and what a success she has made of it. She goes out as President of the Australian Vice-Chancellor's Committee, and will leave a University that achieves in scholarship and teaching far beyond its size. Macquarie is an

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exciting place. It is not a one person band. But Di Yerbury's personality has left its imprint. It was a privilege for me to work with her. Now the intriguing question is: what next for this dynamo of ideas and action?