

Remembering Anne Dunn (1950-2012)

Penny O'Donnell, with Fiona Martin and Peter Dunn

When Ian Richards asked for a tribute to our extraordinary colleague, Anne Dunn, who passed away on July 1, 2012, after a long illness, it was hard to know where to begin.

This is a very difficult farewell.

Anne always seemed invincible, somehow bulletproof. She was a person of enviable vitality, a prodigious work ethic, and an unflappable can-do approach to life that inspired colleagues and students alike. News of her death came as a shock to many.

Robbed of the chance to say goodbye, and thank you, we are left to mourn the passing of a remarkable broadcaster, journalism educator and media scholar who will be remembered for her academic leadership in the media and communications field, her bridge-building between industry and academe and her life-long commitment to public service broadcasting.

This tribute combines some insights into Anne's early life and media work, written by Fiona Martin in consultation with Anne's husband, Peter Dunn, with some of my reflections on Anne's many academic achievements. We lead with her lasting influence on future generations of media professionals.

Anne's ideas and ideals helped shape the way media and communications are researched and taught at the University of Sydney today: they are reflected in the curriculum and, more significantly, in the career decisions and professional practices of hundreds of MECO graduates that she taught over the past decade. We know this better now than ever before because in July we witnessed their outpouring of grief, love, gratitude and fond memories. Former student Kate Leaver put it best when she said: "One of my dearest mentors passed away this year, but I can't bring myself to take her written reference off my resume. Dr Anne Dunn taught me to believe in radio, and her career was proof that a woman's intellect can take her anywhere" (www.womensagenda.com.au, November 19, 2012).

Anne's unrivalled capacity to advocate for Australian journalism education remained undiminished to the end. Picture this: in March this year, Anne joined an Australian Centre for Investigative Journalism debate on the hotly contested Finkelstein Report, in her capacity as president of the Journalism Education Association of Australia. Unperturbed by the other panellists' warnings of dire consequences for press freedom, Anne alone argued the Australian press has a case to answer on falling news standards, because public accountability matters and readers have lost trust in journalists. It was a class act. Even if you disagreed with her, you had to admire Anne's talent for achieving a respectful hearing for a minority point of view.

Or picture this: in late May, Anne presented a paper to the University of Westminster's international conference on the implications of the *News of the World* phone hacking scandal for journalism. You can find the entire panel session, in five instalments, on YouTube. This time, Anne argued for "beefed-up" self-regulation of the press to address the problem of news standards, with "statutory back-up" as an added stick. She spoke at length about Australia's "unhealthy" media concentration, monopoly newspapers and generally poor local coverage of both the UK phone hacking scandal and Australia's Independent Media Inquiry.

With characteristic verve, Anne singled out and praised alternative media (*New Matilda, Crikey*), as well as her preferred news outlet, ABC Radio National, for doing a better job than most.

Part of the reason Anne cut such a persuasive figure was that she was born into broadcasting and storytelling. Her father, Geoff Stone, moved the family from the UK to Australia in 1965 when he came to make a BBC documentary and ended up working as producer for Channel 7. As a university student, Anne loved acting and, according to her brother Dominic Stone, she was committed early on to truth, accuracy and self-knowledge in performance, qualities which she carried through to her journalism career.

Anne's dramatic flair was recognised when, after graduating from the University of Sydney in 1972 with an honours degree in Education, she was invited to present an early ABC-TV children's show, *Switched On Set*. She enjoyed the experience so much that when she moved back to the UK for a period, she applied to host the BBC's *Country Search*, a documentary series for children that took her all over the country. Later, on her return to Australia, Anne devoted herself to factual television, a passion she would share with her husband Peter. With 1970s front-of-camera roles dominated by men, Anne worked instead as researcher, first on the Mike Walsh show (where she barely escaped the amorous attentions of Rolf Harris), and then with Michael Parkinson and Bill Peach. But she longed to communicate more directly with people, a desire that drew her to radio and 2FC, now known as ABC Radio National. She began by producing Geraldine Doogue on *Life Matters*, but it wasn't long before her gentle authority and mellifluous voice secured her a host's role.

In the 1980s, Anne was part of a stronger, vital female presence in Australian broadcasting. Her first major TV series was the ABC's *Holiday*, produced by Peter Dunn, which became a template for the commercial travel series that followed. She also fronted the ground-breaking *Newsvoice*, the first radio show in the country to introduce actuality to reports. This sparked her doctoral research interest in how news audiences were imagined, created and managed, and led to her move into RN management.

Anne combined a rare talent for communication with a natural managerial sensibility, which eventually saw her become a policy advisor to the volatile David Hill. Here she was an astute strategist and negotiator, but widely liked for her no-fuss attitude and enthusiasm. As her ABC colleague Mark Wakeley would later remark: "Behind what might have first appeared as a jolly hockey-sticks demeanour, was a deep intelligence, a delightful wit and generosity of spirit. And, always, a boundless optimism and belief in the world of public broadcasting, a world in which she excelled and was nothing less than 'a one-take wonder'."

In recent months, many wonderful tributes have been written about Anne's subsequent academic achievements. However, I'd ask you to consider her legacy by briefly looking at her last major research project, the RIPE@2012 conference. RIPE is the acronym of Revisionary Interpretations of the Public Enterprise, an innovative European initiative founded in 2002 by the University of Tampere's Professor Gregory F. Lowe to support research on public service media. Anne joined RIPE in 2008, served on the conference-planning group in 2010, and then secured an agreement between the University of Sydney and the Australian Broadcasting Corporation to co-host the group's biennial conference in Australia in September 2012. Such high-calibre international research collaborations can be tough to maintain. Anne brought the right mix of vision, hard work, administrative finesse and persistence to the task, along with a gregarious and cheerful disposition that flatly refused

to succumb to the encroaching cruelties of her illness. Instead, drawing enormous strength from the love and care of those who knew, and shared, her passion for collaborative research – from her husband Peter, daughters Alice and Claire, extended family and wide circle of friends, to her many, many colleagues – Anne worked steadfastly to put together the networks and resources that ensured the eventual success of the conference.

Optimism like that takes a rare kind of courage and belief in the future. Anne Dunn possessed those qualities. An exemplary academic leader, she leaves us with a shining example of the productive potential of industry-university research partnerships. She leaves us with work to be done.

Anne Dunn was a fine academic, inspirational mentor and tireless ambassador for journalism education. She is sorely missed.