

Open Campus 1 (1995)

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Betty Boothroyd

If I were not Speaker, I would probably be a student, because I left school at the age of seventeen and I, when I say I didn't have the opportunities I think that's right, I didn't have the opportunities that there perhaps are today, and I think for people like me that were in my position, it is marvellous.

Narrator

A tribute for The Open University from the Right Honourable Betty Boothroyd, who in April 1992 changed the course of history to become the first woman speaker of the House of Commons.

Betty Boothroyd

I won't be wearing a wig, I want to be comfortable in what I wear, it's a working outfit.

Thank you. It feels great, to change 700 years of Parliamentary history is very daunting, it's very awesome too.

Millions of people outside take this matter very seriously and the House should do likewise and we must hear this debate. Order! Order!

Most people understandably think that all I do is put on a black silk robe and go out and shout order, order. But my day starts very early in the morning by not only reading the order paper but understanding it, getting that under my belt. I also, I have meetings where practically every half hour I leave the chair at 4.30 or 5 then I've got a series of meetings with the Leader of the House, with the Chief Whip, Government Whip, with the Chief Opposition Whip, various members of Parliament. In addition to that I actually chair what is known as the House of Commons Commission, and that is the great management structure that runs this House so I am like the Chairman of ICI if you like, you know, with the various boards reporting to me and I've come to management very late in life. But I employ directly something like 1500 people in the six or seven departments that we have here.

Narrator

Despite coming to management late, Madame Speaker one feels, would have no problem running ICI. As a former Tiller Girl she's always enjoyed taking centre stage.

Betty Boothroyd

I'd always been a dancer and from a very early age I loved dancing and I think I was quite good at it, and the time came when I wanted to be a professional, my father thought it was the worst thing in the world for me to do, it was actually, he was right, but you know, one was indulged a little bit, and I was a dancer for about nine months when I was seventeen, late seventeen, eighteen years old.

Narrator

But politics were always her real passion.

Betty Boothroyd

Well I came up to London to do a job for the headquarters of the Labour Party, and then I came into this House, into the House of Commons to work for two back bench Members of Parliament and subsequently Ministers so working here was an encouragement, I thought well I can do it too. It was a job that I wanted to do and the inevitability of gradualness, but you know, I fought so many

elections, parliamentary elections unsuccessfully before being successful in 1973 at West Bromwich that I was the girl most unlikely to succeed.

I regard this, if I may put it, as secondly to becoming Speaker. I was absolutely overwhelmed when I was approached to see if I would do it, and I considered it, I wanted to, but I took it very seriously because I have a big job here and therefore there are limitations to what I can do outside here. But I thought about it very carefully and I wanted it very much. And I've been to Milton Keynes, I hope to come again, it's very difficult just to spend a half a day there to get to grips with it all but I tell you what I have found since I've become Chancellor, wherever I go, somebody knows about it. I was in India, I did a big tour of India and the Indian sub-continent last year, and there were people associated with our High Commission in New Delhi who were University students. Wherever I go in this country, people come up to me and say I'm doing a course at The Open University. People come to me and say we're going to see you in Birmingham, we're going to see you in Northern Ireland and in Harrogate all, so it is very nice, I feel part of a family, an extended family. But I'm very pleased about it.

John Daniel

Betty Boothroyd, by the authority of the Royal Charter I hereby install you Chancellor of The Open University.

Doreen Massey

Betty Boothroyd is known and respected throughout the land. A recent poll in a national newspaper asked readers whom, in the event of this country becoming a Republic, they would nominate as President [*laughs*]. One in eight respondents came up with exactly the same name and Betty Boothroyd was pronounced the winner. In real life of course, she is Speaker of the House of Commons, and in that role, we have come to know her voice uttering those famous words and to admire her ability to combine real authority with that slight flicker of a smile, that barely registered twinkle in the eye, which keeps it all so good humoured.

John Daniel

Madame Chancellor, it is my privilege and pleasure to ask in the name of the Senate that you accept the Honorary Degree of Doctor of The Open University. I hereby by the authority of the Senate confer on you the Honorary Degree of Doctor of the University.

Betty Boothroyd

Vice-Chancellor, in accepting this I must also mention the historic contribution of my friend and former colleague, the late Jennie Lee. Harold Wilson once summed up her activities on behalf of the University in four words: she was a tigress. I have to say how very touched I was, only a few hours ago, to see Mary Wilson here in Birmingham, representing Harold Wilson. It is a very fine tribute to this university, and Mary, I'm very delighted that you are here.

But I was interested too to see the whole idea of The Open University was actually opposed in the beginning by who, guess by who, by the Treasury and of course by the Department of Education. Vice-Chancellor, in my experience anything which arouses the simultaneous opposition of both the Treasury and a major Whitehall department usually has something to commend it. But I'm delighted to see Tim Boswell here this afternoon who is a Minister of Education, and I know gives us a great deal of support.

But of course there is so much more to commend this university than its triumph over a lack of original vision in Whitehall. More than two million students since 1971, two hundred thousand students studying each year and a worldwide reputation for innovation and excellence. During a

period in which many of our institutions have been under fire, The Open University has been one of our outstanding success stories. Ladies and gentleman it took, as we heard earlier, the House of Commons more than six centuries to elect its first woman Speaker. I'm delighted that it has taken the University only a quarter of a century to appoint its first woman Chancellor.

David Sewart

Michael Rickhuss

Jagtar Malhi

David Oakley

John Daniel

Today Madame Chancellor, it has been our privilege to install you formerly as Head of The Open University. Our students and graduates are inspired by your remarkable career. Many can identify personally with the challenges that you have overcome and we all admire the determination and dedication that you bring to your task as Speaker of the House of Commons. Your desire to underpin the great ideal of representative democracy with sound Parliamentary practice mirrors our aspiration to express the high educational ambitions of our founders in an effective and exciting manner.