

# Ron Castan Humanitarian Award

## Acceptance Speech

Tuesday 20 October 2015

Kathy Kaplan OAM

It is with gratitude that I also acknowledge that we're privileged to meet on the land of the Wurrundjeri people of the Kulun nation. I humbly pay my respects not only to their elders past and present but also to their future leaders.

I feel I need to put this honour into perspective...

Years before Martin Luther King Jr wrote, 'Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere', my grandparents set the bar of how one should behave. It's a bar to which I can only aspire.

Before my family's personal Shoah began, including incarceration and then eight months of hiding in a 50cm mice and flea infested roof space, my Opa and a group of his friends visited the Transit Camp in my family's home town of Žilina in Slovakia, just a two hour train ride from Auschwitz.

Having bribed the Red Cross for their arm bands, my Opa and his mates removed their yellow stars and donned the Red Cross arm bands before setting about making the last few hours of the lives of the Jews stuffed in the cattle trucks just marginally better. They emptied their stinking toilet buckets and provided drinking water. My grandparents and their friends risked their lives to show this small kindness. Almost all of the people on those trains were never seen again.

Like the late and great Ron Castan, the man whose memory we're really honouring here tonight, my grandparents were courageous, bold, open-minded, imaginative lateral thinkers ready to challenge accepted principles. They further demonstrated this when, in 1947, they enrolled my mother in a boys' school – yes, a boys' school - so she could study Matriculation maths and science. And, for the record, despite the fact that Mum had missed several years of formal schooling and despite the fact that she was 'a Jew and a girl', she duxed the boys' school with straight As.

Not surprisingly, with such strong values of compassion, courage, education, generosity, gratitude, fairness, family, hope, justice and kindness so central to my grandparents' being, it's no wonder that my mother and uncle inherited those traits. Mum made it her business to transmit them, in turn, to my sister, to me, and to our children. I feel very blessed to have my Mum, Uncle, Sister, her family and all three of my children here with me this evening.

I must have drunk the spirit of activism and volunteerism with Mum's milk because I simply don't know any other way to be. So any congratulations for anything good I may have done or achieved really should be directed to and at my Mum and my late grandparents, Helen and Armin Windholz of blessed memory.

All I've ever done is just do what I can where and when I can. To be honoured for that is incredulous.

Next Mother's Day will be **impact's** tenth birthday. Established to make a difference to Victorian women and children fleeing extreme violence at home, **impact** is not a Jewish organisation *per se*, but its guiding principle certainly is:

ממנה להבטל חורין בן אתה ולא, לגמור המלאכה עליך לא

*Lo alechah ham'lachah ligmor, v'lo atah ben chorin l'hibatel mimenah.*

It's not up to us to fix the world, but we're not allowed to quit trying. [*Rabbi Tarfon, Pirke Avot, 2:21*]

**impact** has no paid staff. Our only expenses include incorporated fees, insurance, server fees and a \$10 a month rent for a single garage space we use as supplemental storage to my own garage and that of a friend. That means that almost everything of every dollar raised, in cash or in kind, goes to meeting **impact's** mission. I'm really proud of that statistic.

I won't bore you with the many horrifying local statistics about family violence in Australia but let me tell you that *at least* 700 Victorian women, to the best of my current knowledge, *and* their children, are in crisis accommodation every single night as they hide from their violent partner.

In the lead up to each Mother's Day and Xmas, **impact's** volunteers pack and deliver hampers containing essentials and treats for each of these women and we help ensure that Santa finds and gives the children in hiding something special too. **impact** has refurbished refuges and provided interest-free loans for a range of purposes including, nearly two years ago, surgery costs for a child. **impact's** current and immediate future fundraising focus will be to supply **SafeTCards** to more Victorian women at risk.

A **SafeTCard** looks like a conference card. In the pilot study conducted in Melbourne's Eastern Suburbs last year, 40 at high risk women were issued with one of these cards which can be worn over or under the woman's clothes. Their perpetrators were advised of the fact by the courts.

If the perpetrator breaches the intervention order, the woman can press a button on the card and three things happen:

1. GPS coordinates are sent to the police who dispatch a car to the scene immediately
2. The altercation is recorded
3. And, most importantly, that recording is admissible in court.

Should the perpetrator rip the **SafeTCard** from a woman's neck before she has had a chance to press the button, the technology is automatically activated.

Of the 40 women in the pilot study, not one experienced a serious intervention. We need to get more of these **SafeTCards** out. The cost? \$600 per card and \$40 per month activation costs. A trifling amount to save a woman's life, isn't it?

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It isn't easy and it won't be easy but I believe we can change the world when we work together – not because others can't or don't but because we can and must.

Thank you for this extraordinary honour.