

## MEDIA RELEASE

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# Former editor of Eureka Street accepts ACU's highest honour

Australian Catholic University (ACU) has conferred an Honorary Doctorate on Australian journalist and literary critic Morag Fraser AM.

Best known as editor of Jesuit-owned magazine Eureka Street between 1991 and 2003, Ms Fraser accepted ACU's highest honour, a Doctor of the University (Honoris Causa), on 21 October in Melbourne.

The Honorary Doctorate recognises Ms Fraser's work in religious press, particularly in driving literary analysis at the intersection of theology and culture during her time as Eureka Street editor.

"I'm happy to accept this Honorary Doctorate because it pays tribute to all of the people who have made my extremely fortunate life possible," Ms Fraser said.

"I was educated by Catholic women, a strong mother, a father committed to education, and that has led to everything I've done since.

"The work I've been involved in I hope continues the legacy of the Brigidine nuns who taught me, but also the faithful men I've known who are committed to making life better for people other than themselves."

Born to a Presbyterian Scots sea captain and a musically gifted, entrepreneurial Catholic mother, Ms Fraser was habitually reading, drawing or writing as a child, leading to a lifelong interest in media and public life.

After writing her first letter to a newspaper at age 11, at 14 she worked "a classic summer job" persuading mothers and fathers to enter their infants in the Sun News-Pictorial's summer promotion to find the "loveliest beach baby" in Victoria.

Her early days in the newsroom led to her working as a stringer for the Melbourne Herald and Sun. She also became editor of Farrago, the University of Melbourne's student newspaper and the oldest of its kind in Australia.

While editing Farrago she persuaded philosophy student Frank Jackson to act as her chief of staff, "and dear reader I married him".

In 1990 Ms Fraser was handpicked by Jesuit priest Fr Michael Kelly to work on Eureka Street. In 1991 she became its editor, a position she held for 13 years.

"Eureka Street was exactly what its banner headline said, a journal of public affairs, theology and the arts. We believed, and I still believe very strongly, that those three are all complimentary and necessary," Ms Fraser said of the original vision for Eureka Street.

"It was to be a Catholic voice in a pluralist society that would speak to the issues of the day and all the richness of culture that one can bring to it.

"I vividly remember the fourth week in every month: there would come a moment when my stomach would drop, and I'd think, 'We've finally got it. We've got the right mix'."

For her services to journalism, Ms Fraser was made a Member of the Order of Australia in 2004 and in 2005 she became chair of the Australian Book Review.

Ms Fraser said truth should be the imperative for any and all journalists.

“And while I don’t claim ever to have been a classic on-the-beat journalist, truth has always been the lodestar for me, and for anything I have published – in or for both Catholic and secular organs,” she said.

Ms Fraser said her opportunities in journalism and writing – from the early days searching for beautiful beach babies to her days as editor and now publishing reviews and biographies – were prompted by visionary and entrepreneurial men and women she met.

“I’ve known about three or four key entrepreneurs in my life, people who just made things happen all around them,” Ms Fraser said.

“So my life has been parade of them saying ‘you should do this’. The only reason I was foolish or brave enough to do ‘this’ was because I suppose I had been taught, or rather had it rammed into me, that you didn’t say no.”

Ms Fraser’s advice to university students was “say yes and accept responsibility”.

“The world’s there for you to act in it and to have it act on you in ways that broaden you,” she said.

“And don’t see university just as a degree factory, it’s so much more.

“There are so many ways to combat injustice, to counter equality, so if you’re at university, take your studies seriously, and learn those ways.”

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