

ADDRESS BY
HIS EXCELLENCY MAJOR GENERAL MICHAEL JEFFERY AC CVO MC
GOVERNOR-GENERAL OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA
ON THE OCCASION OF
**PRESENTATION OF THE ROYAL HUMANE SOCIETY OF AUSTRALASIA'S CLARKE
MEDAL**
GOVERNMENT HOUSE, HOBART
5 JUNE 2008

May I acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we meet today; their wisdom, enduring history and culture.

Today we acknowledge a selfless act of bravery which merits recognition of the highest order.

Following careful assessment by the Royal Humane Society of Australasia, I am pleased to present the Clarke Silver Medal and 2007 Rupert Wilks Trophy to Miss Melissa Quilliam.

The Society has given public recognition to acts of bravery since its inception in 1874.

It bestows awards on those who risk their own lives in saving or attempting to save the lives of others.

In 1881, the Society instituted the Clarke Medal for acts of extraordinary bravery.

This is presented annually to the most outstanding act of bravery considered during the year.

The Rupert Wilks Trophy is awarded annually for the most outstanding rescue by a child 12 years of age or younger.

As we have heard, Melissa is the fifth recipient to be awarded both the Clarke Medal and the Rupert Wilks Trophy.

Aged just 11 years at the time, Melissa showed extraordinary bravery in rescuing her younger brother from their burning home in June 2003 at Smithton, here in Tasmania.

Early that morning, the household was roused by the sound of the fire detector going off.

Mrs Quilliam tried to put out a fire in the lounge room but, when unable to do so, evacuated the house with her children.

Two men working nearby saw smoke coming from the house, and ran to it to see if there were any occupants.

They were driven back by the thick smoke and heat from the flames inside the house.

Mrs Quilliam emerged with her children and then realised that Zachary, just two years of age, was still inside.

One of the men tried to enter the house but was again driven back by heat and smoke.

At this point Melissa said she was going back in, ran up, ducked past the legs of one of the men who tried to stop her and continued running into the burning house.

In about a minute she emerged from the house carrying her little brother.
Both she and Zachary were evacuated to hospital for treatment for smoke inhalation.

Witnesses confirm that prior to Melissa coming out of the house with her little brother, the windows of the house had shattered from the intense heat.

In the opinion of witnesses and attending fire officers, Melissa's determination and selflessness saved the life of her brother.

This was an extraordinary act in risking extreme danger to go to the aid of her brother and today we recognise that act through the award of the Clarke Silver Medal and the Rupert Wilks Trophy.

I understand Melissa has also received a Certificate of High Commendation from the Commissioner of Tasmania Police.

Melissa, we honour you today for the magnificent act of bravery you displayed; an act that surely saved your brother's life.

Well done indeed.

Ladies and gentlemen

May I say what a great privilege it has been to the Senior Patron of the Royal Humane Society of Australia.

As my term of office comes to a close, I would like to commend all involved in the organisation of events and the Society's operations for the faultless support you have provided to me at all times.

I have had the privilege of investing some remarkable people for extraordinary acts of bravery including:

. two paramedics who at great personal risk rescued a man caught in the Canberra bushfires in January 2003;

. two divers who suffered near asphyxiation in rescuing workmates from the toxic gases in a void on a diving pontoon at Kelso Reef off Townsville;

. the teacher who sought to disarm a gunman firing indiscriminately on fellow students at Monash University in 2002; and

. the lady playing bowls with her family who, while the gunman was still present, rescued a man who had been shot repeatedly.

I wish the Society well in its vital work of recognising the acts of selfless bravery, such as that of Melissa Quilliam whom we honour today.

Well done again Melissa.

Thank you.