QOGA PROFILE

In this issue of Q News, readers will learn about former student, Kate Leaver… her experiences, inspirational people in her life and her hopes for the future. As features editor Cosmopolitan Australia, Kate has a unique perspective on issues affecting women today.

How long did you attend Queenwood?
From Year 1 to Year 12 (so I missed out on the red shoe award by one year!)

What is the most valuable thing you learnt during your time at school?
You mean, other than how to play several of Shakespeare’s male characters because I had a lower voice than the other girls? Truly, that good leadership is about kindness and that joining the debating team early really sets you up with some great argument-building skills.

How have you applied this in your life?
I’d like to think I conduct myself with integrity and compassion – which really are Queenwood values through and through.

Describe your current position as Features Editor Cosmopolitan Australia and what led you to this point.
So, as features ed, really I get to play with words and ideas all day. I’m working across three issues at any one time – generating ideas for features, commissioning stories, working with my writers and a gang of freelancers and columnists, editing copy, writing things myself, coming up with headlines and cover lines, checking and approving copy at every stage. It’s a beautiful process for me, because it requires me to look at the big vision of the magazine and each small detail. It’s hectic, but awesome.

It’s an important mission of mine to get as much news, feminism, mental health coverage, financial/career advice and as many stories about inspirational women as possible into those pages. That means a big part of my job is ambushing readers with knowledge in between sex advice and celebrity interviews. I’ve set myself that challenge, and it’s going really well so far – plenty of room for the Smart Girl articles I love to see.

Did you always know you wanted to work in the media and what sparked your interest?
I’ve always known I wanted to be a writer. But I’ve always had a caveat to working in the media – no ambulance chasing. Actually I told Mrs Bray in Year 12 that I wanted to be a journalist but never, ever the kind that would chase an ambulance. I’m completely uncompromising on that point – I will not invade people’s privacy especially in their most desperate moments, do death knocks or exploit people for their stories. I’m safe here at Cosmo in that respect – we’re all about empowerment and positivity and confidence.

What sparked my interest in writing? My Year 4 teacher, Mrs Emma Harris, who was so obsessed with poetry she made every subject somehow relate to literature. And my Papa, who taught me to play Scrabble when I was really little. It’s a lifelong thing, the love of writing.

What have been some of your learning experiences/professional development since school?
I have a degree in Arts (Media Communications and History) from Sydney University. I loved that, but truly I think I learned more editing the newspaper there, Honi Soit. It was just ten of us in charge of editing/writing/designing/making a 28-page newspaper every week – it was total madness, but great. I did a lot of work experience and interning to back up my degree, too – I always knew I’d need some serious practical skills to get anywhere in journalism. Learning experiences come when you least expect them too – like, when a prominent media personality threatens to sue you for an article you wrote at university, or you accidentally become a finance journalist.

Have you had any significant mentors or people who have inspired you along the way?
So many! I’ve been spoilt for choice in the inspiration category. Let me roll off a few (some of this is name-dropping; some of it is Queenwood-related).

Ross Greenwood, whose radio show I produced before I landed the Cosmo gig, is the kindest man in journalism. He is such a generous mentor – he brings out the fierce ambition in me like nobody else can (and makes me laugh).

Mia Freedman accepted and published so many of my words at mamamia.com.au, which gave me such great exposure (that’s
how I caught the eye of my current editor). She’s a dear friend, too, which is a delightful addition to the mentor relationship.

My university professors continue to inspire me, too – Anne Dunn, who was a radio legend; Megan le Masurier who taught me to love magazines; Marc Brennan who showed me you can write about celebrity culture with academic rigour; Catherine Lumby who started the media degree at Sydney Uni. And my boyfriend’s mother, Linda Connor, who fights for the rights and ethics of her colleagues at Sydney Uni and holds a mean solidarity party.

And Queenwood teachers! I truly had so many whose loveliness I still cherish. I was unwell and absent from school a lot – but that kind of adversity really showed me how special the teachers at Queenwood are. Mr Guy Sherborne, Mr Adrian Muir, Mr Antonio Boschiero, Mrs Marie Young, Ms Sue Charteris, Mr James Harpur, Mrs Carolyn Hurd … were particularly kind, encouraging, and generous with mentorship through high school – and I will always be grateful for the friendship they showed me then.

I actually think about it really often, how lucky I was to have them in my school life. It’s a special place, that Queenwood.

What would you consider to be some professional and personal highlights of your life?

Professional: Other than my awesome new job? Ah… Meeting The Wiggles, interviewing Zach Braff, speaking to a Britney Spears impersonator, doing an a capella sing-off challenge against other journalists.

Personal: Adopting a rescue dog from Monika’s Doggie Rescue – she’s nine and her name is Lady Fluffington. Best decision my boyfriend and I have ever made.

What are your interests outside work?

Reading, comedy, watching really good television, Pilates, history, theatre, mental health advocacy, and good coffee with good friends.

What are the challenges you look forward to in the future?

Oooph. Big question. Whatever comes my way professionally… and whatever comes my way personally, may it be surmountable. Motherhood is definitely in my future, but not any time soon. So is writing a novel and a non-fiction book about Bipolar Disorder – I will find the time and the publisher to do that at some stage.

What do you wish for the current students of Queenwood and girls in general, as the next generation of women who will play their part in society?

Oh my goodness, so much. I taught extra-curricular drama to years 7 and 8 for three years at Queenwood – and I just wanted to protect them all. My maternal instinct was in overdrive. My beautiful cousins are at Queenwood now, and I want for them the same things I want for all young Q’wood students … I want them to value intelligence and integrity over aesthetics; to make good use of how lucky they are; to be kind and safe and well; to be proud, awesome feminists. And to read Cosmopolitan magazine. (Just kidding about that last one. But not really).