

# Speech from Sophie Rigney (2002 Alumnus) at the Peter Jones Peace Prize

It's a great pleasure to be with you today to present the Peter Jones Peace Prize.

I'd like to start by acknowledging the owners of this land, the muwinina people. The muwinina people never ceded their sovereignty over these lands and waters, and I pay my respect to their Elders, their people who have passed, and to all Tasmanian Aboriginal palwa people who are the custodians of this land.

I want to speak a little bit today about what I learned from Peter Jones about peace and justice, and how I've tried to take that into my life and my life's work, before speaking about the entries to the peace prize and why I picked the winning entry.

I attended the Friends' School from Prep to Grade 12, and I had Peter Jones for a teacher in several subjects, and Peter also led me through many years of political activism, particularly in the Amnesty International group. Peter was always incredibly supportive of activism for human rights protection and promotion. Some of my favourite memories of Peter include him taking a great deal of time and making effort to get us to meetings and events for our human rights work; him working alongside us in actions and media events; and him always wearing his heart on his sleeve – very literally, with his lapel pins always showing the causes he was supportive of, like war resisters international. Most important were the values and skills Peter encouraged in us: empathy, even with those we don't know; courage, particularly in our work for a better world;

critical thinking, imagination, listening skills, and understanding injustice as a matter of structures requiring collective activism for change.

These were the values and skills I've tried to take into my life since school. I did a Law Degree at the University of Tasmania, and then started work at the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia in the Hague. This was a court established to try individuals for war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide, during the wars in the 1990s in the former Yugoslavia. I worked there for 3 years, particularly with defendants, including Radovan Karadzic, the former President of the Bosnian Serbs. Working as a defence lawyer for people accused of the 'worst crimes of humanity' is very challenging work, but it is important, because these people have human rights too, including rights to a fair trial and proper defence lawyers.

After leaving the tribunal, I completed a PhD in international criminal law, and then my work changed to focus more on the rights of Indigenous peoples. After several years in the UK, I returned to Hobart in March, and started working at the University of New South Wales, particularly on the Uluru Statement from the Heart. This is really meaningful, as it is concerned with a structural change to the relationship between Australia and Indigenous peoples. In doing this work, I think the values that Peter taught me are being put into practice, particularly imagining a better world and working to bring it into being.

So I was delighted to be asked to judge this year's Peter Jones Peace Prize. I reviewed ten entries, which included poems, short stories, and speeches or essays. The entries needed to be inspired by the Martin Luther King quote, 'If I cannot do great things, I can do small things in a great way'. The entries all dealt with this idea in very diverse ways, but a common theme was that it is

important to act with integrity in your everyday actions. This is really fitting, because this is something that Peter Jones has done for as long as I've known him.

But this was an interesting theme for the competition, because it could invite people to think of 'greatness' and 'smallness' as oppositional, and in doing so, it might set up individual actions as different from community, collective action – to individualise, rather than collectivise, our actions. But I want to suggest that sometimes what we think of as small, individual actions, can also be quite radical and can force wide, systemic change – if done in solidarity with others, and as part of a collective. Consider, for example, a person's conscientious objection to war – something I know Peter holds as a fundamental part of his life, and something that Quakers have as a core part of their faith. This might seem quite a small action, a 'small thing', but people have been imprisoned for this. It would take great courage to stand up to the state in that way. In doing so, those people acted in solidarity with others, and for a collective good. Or another example is that of Martin Luther King himself. Dr King is sometimes portrayed as a peaceful activist, but he was also radical. In working as part of a widespread community of non-violent, but radical direct action, Dr King attacked systems of oppression. In doing small – but brave – things, Dr King challenged white supremacy as a structure. We need to keep these things in mind today, as we work collectively and in solidarity with others in movements like Black Lives Matter, to imagine a world without systems of oppression, particularly white supremacy and state violence.

So I've been asked to nominate a runner-up and a winner. I'm happy to announce that the runner up is Tom Petty, for his speech on capitalism, and

the winner is Annabel Woolward's piece of Slam poetry, entitled 'One Day at a Time'.

Tom made an impassioned argument against capitalism as a structure, and successfully used theories, examples, and facts to make his case. I would actually disagree with Tom's conclusion that we just need a great leader, like Karl Marx, to ensure societal change – I think, instead, we need widespread alternative systems and a collective force – but I enjoyed Tom's critical thinking and his linking of the local to the broad questions of justice. This piece reminded me a lot about learning about Marxism as a worldview with Peter Jones in religious studies, and the debates we had in that class about Marx.

Annabel's slam poetry was exceptional. I thought it was reminiscent of an early Kae Tempest, Britain's premier spoken-word performer and poet: like Tempest, Annabel used spoken word in a thoughtful, powerful way, to link the individual and community levels of justice. It was a confident and brave piece of work, and what I thought was especially compelling about this was the way that you could tell every single word have been carefully thought about. It addressed the topic really well, and was perfectly crafted.

So congratulations to Tom and to Annabel, I was very impressed with all entries and delighted to see that young people are so inspired by questions of social justice and peace.