

I really appreciate the honour and the opportunity to speak this evening not just as a previous recipient of a SHINE Award but also as living proof that a SHINE award is not like an Honorary BAFTA or Oscar fellowship - awarded at the end of careersand seem to be one step away from an obituary!! A SHINE award, as I'm sure you'll see this evening, encourages and recognizes future potentialas well as past achievement. So it is in that spirit that I am delighted to speak this evening.

One of my heroes, Eleanor Roosevelt..... coined a phrase which combines our traditional drink with one of our feminine virtues:

“A woman is like a tea bag - you never know how strong she is until she gets in hot water”.

There are plenty of hot water moments in tourism but look at the gains, the pleasures and the privileges.

So I'd like to take this chance to reflect on some of those hot water moments, as well as the pleasures and privileges of working in this industry.

Yes, this is a dream job; being entrusted to promote one's country around the world and invite the world to visit is a huge privilege.

To be a champion of the richness, diversity and excellence of our tourism offering and to be daily reminded of the stunning array of history, countryside, arts and entertainment, vibrant cities and sporting heritage makes me happy and proud.

And to be appointed VisitBritain's first female Chief Executive, last year, on the fortieth anniversary of the Development of Tourism Act - which established the national tourist boards - is a great honour. So maybe it's true, life really does begin at 40.

So, how did I get here?

I had a good education in a somewhat traditional girls' school in Edinburgh (think Prime of Miss Jean Brodie) where I participated fully in school activities: sport, music, debating society etc. But it was the kind of school that didn't know much about **life**. In a complete absence of guidance and feedback I hadn't a clue about my strengths and weaknesses and what the future might hold. But I received a great deal of encouragement on the academic front and went to Edinburgh University to study German and English.

With a strong interest in languages and communications, I was drawn to journalism and the media. I don't think I'd heard of public relations at that point and I certainly wasn't aware of tourism as career option this wasn't the dark ages but really those industries and professions were in their infancy.

My language degree didn't really equip me for the workplace so I did a year at college doing business studies with shorthand and typing – one of the best, most practical moves I made. No one could have foreseen the computer age and the internet back then but my keyboard skills have stood me in good stead.

On leaving college I landed a job at the BBC World Service – in their German Language department. So after stints at the BBC, book publishing and an extended gap year, I found myself in the press office of the then English Tourist Board ...

The very idea of people taking their holidays in England..... was for me at that time an alien thought!

I'd never had a holiday in England, and having grown up overseas, I had lived abroad more than I'd lived in the UK. The only bit of England I knew was what you could see from the train window on the journey between London and Scotland.!

So I had a lot to learn, but I immediately found the job absorbing and interesting.

That was nearly 25 years ago!

With hindsightI can see that I had the good fortune to land in an industry that was growing, and one at which Britain really excels.

I couldn't have foreseen that, but it has certainly provided the platform for a most varied and interesting career.

Back in 1985 the tourism industry was worth nearly £27bn in today's money – it is now worth five times that. Fourteen million visitors came to Britain – that figure has more than doubled as we welcomed some 30 million last year

Huge strides have been made in quality and service

The late 80s were also a time of innovation and investment in tourism. Former industrial cities were reinventing themselves around the visitor economy.

Festival marketplaces was a new concept – imported from Boston and Baltimore where former run down city centres..... were transformed with shops, events and street art. This provided the inspiration for Covent Garden - which was nearly lost to developers ... and other urban centres such as Birmingham and Manchester.

This was also the time when the English Tourist Board claims to have 'invented' the concept of the short break – under the Let's Go banner – fondly referred to as 'have it away'.

Center Parcs chose to invest in England and opened its first park here, thereby transforming our holiday villages. And the 'Take the Plunge' initiative made sure that most of our hotels have swimming pools and spas.

Interest in activity holidays grew – and we promoted walking, boating and cycling but things have moved on and now you can go zorbing, coasteering and geocaching too!

Looking back over those 25 years the pleasures have included being at the heart of many of our national celebrations and anniversaries, using them all as platforms to promote Britain and inspire visitors: Euro 96, the Queen's Golden Jubilee, the Millennium, and most recently Liverpool Capital of Culture. And looking to the future, the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games!

Yes, some great gains and pleasures. But as I've said – there **are** the hot water moments too. We've been hit by crises: Foot and Mouth and the 9/11 attacks in 2001, the terrorist attacks in July 2005. And slower burn crises like SARS and Avian flu. Responding to these events has been a huge challenge. At VB we've done all we can – through the creation and running of the TIER (Tourism Industry

Emergency Response) group to lessen their impact on businesses and to reassure visitors.

Ironically, it's in times of crisis..... that the value of tourism gets greatest recognition.

But our big challenge is to get recognition for the industry in **good** times as well as the bad.

To move tourism up the agenda so that politicians and policy makers do more to enable the industry to flourish. To realize all of the benefits which flow from tourism – jobs, regeneration, foreign exchange, investment in our cultural and natural assets.

Because the fact is that tourism can create new wealth and jobs here in the UK - jobs that can't be moved abroad as happens with manufacturing, IT, call centres, and banking.

What I mean is Stonehenge, St Paul's Cathedral, and Edinburgh Castle can't be outsourced to Shanghai or Bangalore.

Ours is one of the few industries that employs people, creates wealth and sustains local economies in **every constituency** in the UK, literally from Land's End to John O'Groats.

Research undertaken by my team at VisitBritain shows that there are 134 constituencies where tourism jobs accounts for 10% or more of total employment. That's just under one quarter of the House of Commons.

If the Government took a more proactive approach to the development of the visitor economy and increased their investment in marketing this country around the world, we could benefit from winning more overseas visitors and creating many thousands of new jobs.

And what about those new jobs?. According to all the evidence women would be the major beneficiaries: last week's 'Economist' revealed that in the European Union women have filled 6million of the 8million new jobs created since 2000. In America three out of four people thrown out of work since the "mancession" began – The Economist's phrase, not mine - have been male.

The good news for women is that business now wants collaborative leadership, relationship skills, sharing of information, and win/win negotiation—skills that come easily to most women.

And why is this important for the women in our industry?Because we represent up to 70% of the tourism workforce in the United Kingdom. And tonight we're here to celebrate the contribution of a small but special handful of these

women – all shortlisted for a Shine award, and we'll soon hear who the winners are Not long to wait now!

I'd like to endwith some thoughts which pay homage to the values of the Shine awards.

The first is that a professional, personal legacy is not a CV of titles and dates; it is how you encourage, mentor and develop the people with whom you work. A manager's legacy - real legacy – is not..... what they take with them to a new job ... but what they leave behind.

As an industry we are blessed with a yearly crop of passionate, creative, highly-skilled young people..... who want to enter this industry as a career choice. Let's repay that faith..... by helping them on their way.

The second is that tourism is an industry which is built on communication – selling, inspiring, storytelling. I've learned that the best communication is about being honest and clear; frame your expectations well - build a better dialogue not a better monologue.

And don't dismiss passion and enthusiasm. If you can't evoke a little poetry and passion in serving your customers or selling this wonderful country then maybe you're in the wrong job!.

And lastly remember that you may be goodbut your team is better. You can only really achieve with the consent, hard work, the belief and the energy of those around youand none of that can be assumed - it must be encouraged, developed and earned.

Look around and identify your role models – women and men! Observe them closelybecause that's how you learn. There are good lessons to be learned from **poor management** and bad leadership too. That's not meant to sound 'sour' but..... to be on the receiving end of bad management does help you to formulate your ideas of how not to treat people and therefore how to do it better!

On a positive front..... I've learned so much from experienced and talented colleagues – and the occasional wise or inspirational boss.. And I have benefited from some very positive female role models around me – such as Penny Cobham who was on the ETB board 20 years ago and is now chair of Visit England – and Janis Kong former chairman of Heathrow Airport and now a VB Board member. Not only are they successful in business and in public life, they are funny, warm, helpful and supportive – and give feedback! Support and feedback are valuable commodities – and especially so when the going gets tough..... for those hot water moments that Eleanor Roosevelt spoke about.

SHINE applauds strength, courage, leadership, mentoring and professionalism..... that's why its awards are so important..... and for me, so special. Congratulations to all the shortlisted candidates..... you have earned the recognition of your colleagues, peers and employers. Congratulations Alessandra and Gaby..... for conceiving the Shine Awards – and thank you for inviting me to speak this evening.

Ends.

SD 20 Jan 2010