

Good Manners in Law: **II – Good Thoughts in Bad Times (continued)**

Miss Manners was disappointed not to be invited to the farewell party for Mr Hannan SM, which she hears was well-attended by all the town's (what she hopes are oxymorons) criminal lawyers.

Of course, Miss Manners QC, founder member of the Groucho Marx Club, Darwin Uninc., has failed, reprehensibly, to join the Criminal Lawyers' Club – perhaps because she fears she might not be fully accepted.

Miss Manners was once made to feel ill at ease in her own home by the wife of an English lawyer who sneered openly at 'people who wear lipstick'. Miss Manners also wore earrings. This was in the dying days of the Woodstock generation and the person in question was a bedraggled creature with lanky hair and a contempt for what she put on her back each day. She had accompanied her husband to Australia in order to travel with Diamond Jim McClelland's Maralinga Show. The lawyers were both 'criminal' and 'civil'. At least one of them inhaled. Thirteen years later, Miss Manners would not mind betting that the person in question has since converted to lipstick in a bid to combat the advancing invisibility syndrome. As it happens, the person was descended from a famous Victorian illustrator, which just goes to show that a strong bourgeois upbringing and talent in the genes does not necessarily protect against double standards or convert to social grace. Bad manners are a habit and can be overcome.

Rule No. 1: Don't abuse hospitality – the most universal and fundamental of all social taboos, ranking with - don't carnally know your parents.

Ever since that occasion Miss Manners has felt a certain ambivalence when in the presence of criminal, or worse, civil lawyers – now there's a challenge to credibility in this day and age – so it's probably best that she confines her patronage to the Groucho Club. Even so, she hears, a little wistfully, that the Hannan farewell was a grand bash, finishing only in the small hours at *Petty Sessions*.

Some lawyers have had difficulty with Miss Manners's observations about Over-Familiarity. Let me explain.

To take the example of the telephone:
WRONG

Ring-ring

Ans: Good morning, I mean afternoon. Rape, Pillage and Plunder & Associates. Brunhilde speaking. How can I help you?

COMMENT: *Be warned – help is the last thing which is looming.*

Caller: Good afternoon. May I speak with Mr Plunder. It's Murg...

Ans: Mr Plunder is out of the office. Can anyone else help you?

Caller: Mr Plunder is expecting my call. It's Murg...

Ans: I'm sorry, Mr Plunder is not available. Could you call back later?

Caller: May I leave a message please?

Ans: If you like (*insist*). Who's calling?

Caller: Murgatroyd Manners. My number is...

Ans: Did you say Murgatroyd? How do you spell that, Murgatroyd?

And so on.

ALTERNATIVELY, ALSO WRONG

Ans: Rape, Pillage, Plunder Associates.

Caller: May I speak with Mr Plunder, please? Murgatroyd Manners calling.

Ans: Which Mr Plunder do you want?

Caller: The letter just says P. Plunder.

Ans: Mr Plug Plunder or Mr Punce Plunder?

Caller: I've no idea, it's matrimonial.

Ans: That's probably Mr Plug Plunder.

Mr Punce Plunder is our construction law consultant. What was your name again?

Caller: My name is still Murgatroyd Manners.

Ans: Hold on Murgatroyd (*giggle*). (*Ring-ring*)

Ans 2: Plug Plunder (*deep sigh*).

Caller: Ah, Mr Plunder. Murgatroyd Manners here from Manners Inc. I'm calling in relation to the property settlement in the matter of Hope.

Ans 2: Righto, Murgatroyd, I'll have to get back to you on that. I don't think we need to worry about it at this stage – it hasn't been listed (*Don't you worry about that/Don't call me, I'll call you.*)

And so on.

RIGHT

Caller: May I speak with Mr Plunder please. It's Murgatroyd Manners

speaking.

Ans: Certainly Miss Manners. Please hold while I connect you.

Ans 2: Plug Plunder.

Caller: Murgatroyd Manners calling about the Hope matter, Mr Plunder.

Ans 2: Have we met? Please call me Plug. I have that listed for next week.

Caller: Certainly. And I'm Murgatroyd. I wonder if we can talk about some figures before that date?

It's all too easy, really. If you use your wit, which includes signing correspondence with a full name not just an initial.

Another of Miss Manners's favourite signs of identity anxiety occurs when counsel seem to feel they are there to prostrate themselves before the bench rather than stand up politely and firmly as officers of the court.

When it comes to the protocol of entering an appearance:

– My name is Miss Manners, Your Honour and I appear for the defendant, is WRONG.

– My Name is Murgatroyd Manners, Your Honour etc. is also WRONG.

– My name is Manners, Your Honour, and I appear... is RIGHT.

The redundant and extremely self-referential fashion of attributing a Mr/Mrs/Ms to one's name first came to Miss Manners's attention in the Court of Petty Sessions in Perth a decade ago and one couldn't help but wonder if the person in question hadn't a hidden agenda in thus addressing the extremely debonair Deputy Chief Magistrate who was also an eligible, rich bachelor. But Miss Manners digresses. The fact is that the virus seems to have spread across the border, and it should be opposed robustly as it makes counsel look and sound insecure and silly. Your name is the least important information you'll impart to the decision-maker and you do it as a courtesy and for the record. You should just act like a professional and get on with it, and not dither about fiddling with the buttons on your gloves.

Manners, QC

To Be Continued

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