

TYING A KNOT IN THE BLUEY

Elmore Leonard's new novel "Pagan Babies" lies on the desk in front of me without a page turned. A phenomenon akin to the "divine wind" or Kamakazi that swept Kublai Khan's troops into the sea has just torn through the northern suburbs of Darwin. Mandatory sentencing is dead. Freedom of Information legislation is not a long way off. The Public Order and Anti-social Behaviour Act looks like it is about to eat it's last meal. I feel like I have been discharged from a psychiatric hospital after a long illness. Is it true or is somebody coming to get me and take me back?

The intrusion of democracy into the Northern Territory's settled state of affairs has sent quite a few people into a bit of a spin. They had hoped democracy would return but it had been away so long most of them just didn't recognise it in the crowd. It came as a bit of a shock for some to renew the acquaintance. Since then most of those people have been wandering around exhibiting a state of mind that was once found at parties in the late sixties. Some legal practitioners undertook to be drunk for a week if there was a change of government. With an eye to the Rules of Professional Conduct and from where I stand, most of them seem to have remained true to their oath.

The business end to all of this is for the Law Society to establish a dialogue with the new government as soon as possible. That pleasant duty will be for a new President of this organisation to discharge. The Annual General Meeting will be held on 5 September and this is my last column as President. It has been a hell of a ride over the last two years capped by the events of election night 2001. Those events will continue to reverberate within the legal community like the swell that struck the North Shore during Big Wednesday — a day which resides in the mythology of every Australian kid who has ridden a surf board.

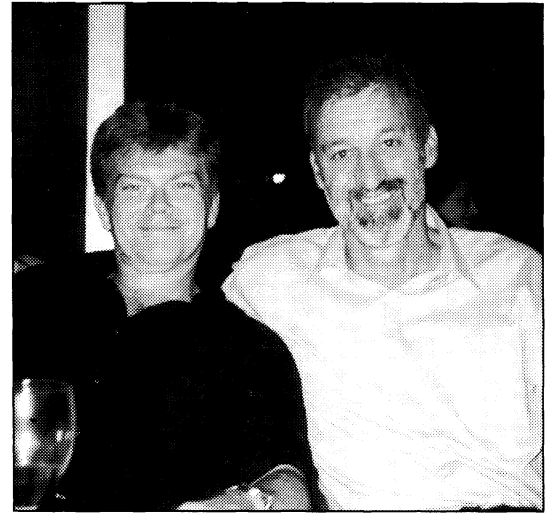
My time is done. I could not have chosen better circumstances in which to arrange for my own departure had I sat down and

dreamed them up. I believe the Society is well placed to assist the new government with a program of much needed reform that is exciting and of enormous future benefit to the Northern Territory community. The new Attorney-General is Dr Peter Toyne. On behalf of the Law Society Northern Territory I extend to him our congratulations.

On recent mornings down at the Roma Bar the drone of conversation to be heard over the sound of bacon spitting on the griddle has taken on an exuberant tone. That steamy haunt of erstwhile revolutionaries which has always greatly irritated the member for Katherine is quickly becoming a coffee spot for, ironically, government advisers. The talk has turned from what should be done to how it should be done. It appears at this stage at least that the legislative agenda which is proposed by the government is one that the Law Society would like to see introduced at the earliest possible time.

I have enjoyed the opportunity of representing Northern Territory lawyers. In particular I have been grateful to the legal community for its good will and support in circumstances where the government of the day was ill at ease with the position of the Society on issues of importance as well as the manner in which they were publically advocated. I hope the Society continues to make it's views well known. Whether lawyers like it or not the profession will, from time to time, be called upon to adopt a viewpoint that might offend, or does offend, some powerful entity or other. That is the responsibility of our profession. Lawyers cannot claim to be independent without being prepared to suffer the bleak stare of ostracism. Comfort and conviction are not always close mates.

I want to thank the Secretariat for the magnificent support that I have received over the last couple of years. It is not unusual for a President to get into strife from time to time and I have managed to get myself into the odd spot of trouble



Jon Tippett, Law Society President with Peter Toyne, Attorney-General

from which I had to be rescued like a possum from a floating branch in a flood. I want to also thank members of the two Councils with whom I have had the good fortune to serve. They have been peopled by strong men and women anxious to see the legal community fulfill it's obligations to the administration of justice and to the community while at the same time having an ability to prosper in the business of legal practice.

The Law Society will always come in for its fair share of criticism. If it is active politically or socially then it is either not doing enough or doing too much. I would rather it be guilty of the latter.

In Book VI of the Republic the conversation turns to what happens after the system of law giving has been determined. Socrates says "Now we have finished with this after all our difficulties we still have some more things left to discuss: what method, what learnings, and what doings, will produce these, our saviours of the constitution, and keep them among us - and the age when each group shall take up each". And so it is with the Society. The election of the new government is the end of some damaging and divisive issues, in particular that of mandatory sentencing. It also creates an opportunity to do things better by using our knowledge to advance the process of change in preference to the prejudice of making a judgment before you have looked at the facts. Let us take that opportunity.

It has been an honour. Thank you. Now it is time to pack up my gear, tie a knot in the bluey and say cheerio.