

Dedication and Opening of the Toowoomba Preparatory School
Creative Arts Centre
Saturday 9 September 2000

The Hon P de Jersey AC, Chief Justice of Queensland

Your Grace, Headmaster, the Hon Russell Cooper, MLA, Bishops, Councillors, members of the staff, students, ladies and gentlemen.

I at once join the Archbishop in thanking you for your patience. Please be assured that a number of us planned our travel from Brisbane with some care to ensure we would not delay you. As we sat in stationary traffic for some time on the Brisbane-Ipswich motorway, enduring the consequence of the overturned semi-trailer – which in the courts we irreverently refer to as an “act of God”, my wife reminded me of the question: “What makes God laugh?”, and the answer – “people making plans”. But there is always a solution to a problem, ladies and gentlemen, and the solution to ours was your gracious patience: thank you very much indeed!

What a marvellous new Creative Arts Centre! It will be a real pleasure officially to open it. I notice it has even been equipped with an inspirationally beautiful view!

The Toowoomba Preparatory School is to be warmly commended upon this fine new centre. Its being inspirational, is unsurprising. This is a school in tune with the expectations of a new millennium – and it rightly boasts leadership qualified to fulfil them!

I congratulate you all: Headmaster, staff, Council, parents and friends, former students... and I say most significantly, current students, to whom I want particularly to speak for a few moments this morning.

The arts play an important role in education, and throughout our lives. Studying creative arts makes us better-rounded people – and it is fun! You students are all very fortunate to attend a school which demonstrably recognises the value of rich and diverse artistic study. Here you may experience music, visual arts, dance, theatre and manual arts and technology. I confess this range seems truly amazing to me, when compared with my own primary schooling of about four decades ago! In those days, the limit of our artistic study was, well, I can't remember! So I hope you will have a lot of fun learning these wonderful things.

Now to express what some people would condemn as absolute heresy. Participating in the arts is every bit as important as playing sport. It is, by the way, much less dangerous, and certainly more friendly. It draws people together, rather than encouraging them to compete. The language of music, for example, is spoken all over the world: we can learn about other cultures, and communicate with others, through song, dance and artistic expression. This is not to deny, of course, that the Olympic Games are immensely important!

For some of you, studying the arts at Prep may develop talents which see you become great musicians, actors and artists. You may follow successful past students like Fiona White, who studied at the Conservatorium and is embarking on an opera singing career. Perhaps you will see yourself become Toowoomba's next Gina Jeffries, rising to country singing fame, topping the National Country Charts and winning Golden Guitars!

Others will pursue different interests. But the artistic skills you learn now will enrich you, whatever your life's path. As you may know, I work in the law – sometimes thought an unduly dull vocation. But I admit I still greatly enjoy playing the piano to our dog, Polly, even if it is carefully contrived to occur when no-one else is around! My invariable experience, I should candidly reveal, is that Polly immediately falls asleep: and my uninspired “talent” in that direction does not extend to Brahms' Lullaby!

It is possibly now, while you are youthful, energetic and glowingly creative, that you will derive most enjoyment and benefit from these studies. The most successful adult artists pursued their fields from an early age: they remain inspired by the experiences of their younger years. George Miller, the director, producer and screenwriter who gave life to the story of the clever little sheep pig in the movies *Babe* and *Babe: Pig in the City*, developed a love for his work while growing up in a rural Australian town. The Saturday matinee at the local movie cinema was his only experience of the outside world: he and his brothers were forever acting out the latest serial. My own childhood memories of

matinees at the Longreach “Roxy” theatre remain quite vivid! Miller describes his childhood as “an invisible apprenticeship in filmmaking”¹.

And now, of course, you have been waiting for her, and so patiently: J.K. Rowling, author of *Harry Potter*, soon to be made by Warner Brothers into live action films: she finished her first written story when only six². I’m sure you are only slightly envious of Daniel Radcliffe, selected to play the film version of young Harry!

Many of the finest musicians started their musical tuition when very young – for example the acclaimed Concertmaster of the Queensland Philharmonic Orchestra, Warwick Adeney: he started learning the violin from his mother when aged only five³.

Finally, there is your own famed Geoffrey Rush, actor, director, writer and musician, who from his early years impressed audiences on the stage, winning many theatrical awards, before cementing a successful film career with his Oscar-winning performance in *Shine*⁴.

Who knows, then, what lies in store for you Prep students? You know: it will at this school be the best of which you are capable! You will be inspired by the many fine

¹ Homepage of *Babe: Pig in the City*, www.babeinthecity.com/behindthescenes/indexcrew.html

² Gale Group biography of JK Rowling, www.gale.com/freresrc/womenhst/rowling.htm

³ Homepages of the Queensland Philharmonic Orchestra,
www.qpat.com.au/philharmonic/04_orchestra/players/adeney.htm

⁴ Great Moments on the Australian Screen – Biography of Geoffrey Rush,
www.sna.net.au/greatmoments/bios/rush/greatmom_bio_rush.html

performers who found passion for the arts when students like you. Your school arts program is an exciting one. I know you will enjoy active participation.

Most of all, may the Toowoomba Prep Creative Arts Centre be filled with music, laughter and happiness, for many, indeed countless years to come.

[It is with great pleasure that I now declare this Centre officially open!]