

Address To Graduates Tuesday, 16 December 2003

Chancellor, Vice-Chancellor, Members of Senate, Members of Staff,
Distinguished Guests, Graduates, Ladies and Gentlemen.

Might I at the outset express my gratitude to the Senate of this University for the honour they have today bestowed on me. When I came to this University as a fresher in 1956, and indeed when I finally graduated in 1962, even in my wildest dreams I never saw myself receiving such an honour. In my younger days recipients of honorary degrees always appeared to be people who had recently retired from active professional life. Perhaps because of that, the thought occurred to me when first told I was receiving this degree that it was a hint that the time had come for me to retire from the Bench. It was perhaps unfortunate that a day or so later I came across a passage in a book I was then reading, being a collection of the best Australia sports writing over some 200 years. The piece was by an anonymous author published in The Bulletin of 15 November 1890 about the Melbourne Cup of that year which was won by Carbine. There was, apparently at that time, a gentleman who frequented the racecourse by the name of Baronet Clarke. According to the author, and I quote, Clarke “arrives not driving a coach as of yore but in the calm retirement

of a brougham. Hereditary distinction seems to be settling in the bard's knee-joints, and he clammers from his equipage in a manner befitted to an honorary LL.D". I certainly hope that the weight of my bonnet and gown will not so weaken my knee joints that my gait emulates that of Baronet Clarke.

Might I at this stage offer my sincerest congratulations to each and every one of you who has graduated here this afternoon on your achievement. Graduation marks the end of many years of hard work; it is the end of one significant chapter but the beginning of a life time of opportunity. Hopefully each of you will be able, as I can, to look back on your university days as some of the best times of your life. Those of you who embark on professional careers will find that friendships made on this campus will be of lasting benefit throughout your career. You will be working with people you know you can trust, that knowledge coming from friendship.

Unfortunately most of you will enter a world dominated by competition. When I graduated from this University a degree in law was a passport to a successful professional career. With less than 20 graduating in law each year it was possible to go straight from university to success as a junior barrister. Whilst first accommodation was spartan (in my case it was

always a concern on Monday morning to find out whether or not the rats breeding behind the fruit shop below had eaten through the phone cables) one was able to make a comfortable living from the outset. Now with a number of Law Schools in this State graduating hundreds of students in law per year the introduction to professional practice is much harder. There is competition from the start and unfortunately that even gets greater as one climbs the professional ladder.

Whilst what I have just said relates in particular to those of you pursuing a career in law, I suspect that much the same is true for those of you who will be otherwise finding positions in business and commerce.

With all of that competition there comes other pressures which must be addressed. There is always a temptation to outdo a friend, and friendly rivalry can quickly become bitter antagonism. There is often a temptation to brush aside ethical standards in order to achieve quickly a desired result. Often it is perceived that by being less than honest one can more certainly achieve one's goal.

The relatively easy going pace of life on a university campus does not readily equip one to deal with such pressures. Unfortunately it is often

only the school of hard knocks which teaches one how to respond appropriately when under such pressures. But I can assure you that if you remain true to your ideals, loyal to your profession, act ethically towards colleagues and clients, and are prepared to learn from experience then in 20, 30 or 40 years from now you will be able to look back on a successful career and say that your university education provided you with the solid platform on which your professional or business life has been based.

I think it also appropriate that I again take up a topic that I have mentioned in speaking at Law Alumni functions. I have been fortunate over the last 10 or 15 years to have had a deal of contact with Americans, particularly American lawyers, and American Universities. When Americans speak of his or her alma mater the reference is usually to the University from which their ultimate degree was obtained. In general Americans appear to place much more significance on their university education than their earlier schooling. Ultimately that is reflected in the fact that most American Universities rely heavily on donations from their graduates to continue their teaching and research facilities. Earlier this year I had the good fortune to visit the Law School at the University of Indiana in Indianapolis where the Dean is Professor Tarr who until a few years ago was Dean of the TC Beirne School of Law here. The building is relatively new and has excellent facilities for staff and students.

Virtual total funding was provided by the legal profession. I mention that the Moot Court in that building is of comparable size to the Banco Court in the Supreme Court building in Brisbane. Once a quarter the Supreme Court of Indiana sits in that Moot Court room to enable the law students to see the superior court of the State working. Apparently the exercise is a great success.

In Australia when one speaks of an alma mater, or the old school tie, the reference is generally to one's secondary school and not to one's university. I have wondered why that was so. The conclusion I have reached is that here one spends longer, on average five years, in one's secondary school than one does in obtaining a basic degree at University. Further, secondary school activities are much more controlled and regulated and in consequence there is more of an emotional bonding with school activities, by contrast with the more flexible life one leads at university.

I do not advocate that Australians should loosen or downgrade their bonds with their secondary school, but the time has come for University graduates to acknowledge as a significant alma mater the institution where they received their tertiary education. For reasons which I will elaborate on in a moment, it is, to my mind, becoming more important for

people who achieve distinction in professional or business life to acknowledge their indebtedness to their university.

Australians in general do not have surplus funds to the extent that Americans do, and we will not be in a position to privately endow our universities as the Americans do. But with the proliferation of Universities and the reduction in Government funding available to support their operations, there is greater competition for commercial sponsorship, particularly of research programs within Universities. Probably the greatest difference between the University I attended from 1956 to 1962 and this University today is the extent to which the University is now dependent upon the private sector for funding for its core activities. I am certain I am not defaming Chancellor Hirschfield and Vice-Chancellor Story, names familiar to my generation, when I say that they would be amazed at the workload imposed on and probably not be capable of carrying out the work now placed on the shoulders of Chancellor Edwards and Vice-Chancellor Hay. In the 1950s this University was in the fortunate position of being the only University in the State, and government funding was more than adequate to meet its needs.

Why I urge graduates of this University to acknowledge as they progress through professional and business careers that they received their tertiary education at the University of Queensland is that, given the intense competition now between universities, the comparative standing of universities is heavily dependent upon the achievement of graduates. Rankings of universities, and schools within universities, at both national and international levels, are regularly published. Frankly I do not understand the criteria used in determining such rankings, but as any Vice-Chancellor will tell you, the rankings are of critical importance. That is where all of us can help. By crediting the University with our achievements we are doing our bit to ensure that it attains the ranking it deserves. That then makes the task of the Chancellor and Vice-Chancellor that much easier when it comes to securing necessary funding. Even after graduation our University needs our support.

Finally, I again express my gratitude to the University for the honour bestowed on me and again congratulate all who have graduated here today and wish you well in your future careers.