



**University of Southern Queensland Graduation Ceremony for
Faculty of Arts and the Faculty of Engineering & Surveying
Saturday 17 April 2004, 10am
Toowoomba**

Chief Justice Paul de Jersey AC

I treasure the opportunity to congratulate such a redoubtable band of high achievers. That you are shortly to graduate from this fine University will I hope be a source of continuing pride for you, and also of course, for your families and friends.

Although I can't remember who spoke at my graduation ceremonies, or even one word of what he said – it would in that era almost certainly have been a "he", I do still relish many fond memories of university days, not the least meeting my wife to be in the law library. I hope your experience will be the same – though my wife I should make clear remains my own.

My era at university – and my studies were arts and law – was the second half of the 1960's: popularly portrayed as refreshing, progressive – some said "swinging" – even revolutionary. Was it a revolutionary era? I doubt it was any more than "questioning". And as an illustration of its residual conservatism, I offer this, relevant to our graduates this morning.

Some have suggested the Arts graduates of the 1960's were all red-necked Bolsheviks rather dismissive of those with higher intellects but weaker imaginations. The reality is the thoughtful English honours students were deeply envious of the luminous engineers: those experts who could design a bridge, if not to link civilisations, well ... to link St Lucia and Dutton Park and reduce bus fares!



University of Southern Queensland Graduation Ceremony for
Faculty of Arts and the Faculty of Engineering & Surveying
Saturday 17 April 2004, 10am
Toowoomba

I imagine friendly rivalry between the disciplines persists. For my own part, I am daunted by those, like engineers and surveyors, endowed with mathematical prowess. They include my brother, a professor of biochemistry, which alone probably explains why we have not had an academically based discussion in 20 years!

You impress for your academic dedication and commitment to self-development – development which I hope you are in part directing to the service of others. Most of you are comparatively young. If you presently characterize your bent as idealistic, please do not let it become stale. Australia dramatically needs novelty, youthful vigour, inspiration, and people like you have traditionally been a reliable source of those invigorating energies. Dare to be different, and I don't mean kayak up Mt Everest or circumnavigate the earth with a leaf blower. You are specially distinguished by your cerebral capacities: don't waste them, and among their beneficiaries, please include the community. Also don't forget to identify some heroes, and bask in the benign rays of their example. What I like about Australia is the privilege of being an Australian. I am sure your experiences at this front-rank institution will have reinforced your own acceptance of that privileged position.

George Orwell wrote the novel "1984" a year after I was born: no, not in 1929, but in 1949. We are now two decades on from 1984. What do we discern of what, in Oxford Companion (to English Literature, fourth edition, page 580) terms, Orwell warned as "the possibility of the police state brought to perfection, where power is the only thing that counts, where the past is constantly being modified to fit the present, and where the official language ... progressively narrows the range of ideas and independent thought"?

Well ... fortunately not much like our 2004. But then again, what of Zimbabwe, where the rule of law is dead and the machinations of government



**University of Southern Queensland Graduation Ceremony for
Faculty of Arts and the Faculty of Engineering & Surveying
Saturday 17 April 2004, 10am
Toowoomba**

have ventured beyond the Orwellian to the Kafkaesque? And what to make of a culture where conventional heroes erode important patterns of stability by justifying abnormal behaviour as routine? Civilisation will collapse if we do not uphold conventional morality and institutions central to stability. And should we not be dispirited when personal failure is so regularly blamed on “stress”? In more robust times, stress was thought to enhance life performance, not justify under-performance. As a “natural reaction to pressure”, stress often “goads us on to greater things” (The London Times, 27 February 2004, page 29). I was appalled to read recently there are more than 11 million websites devoted to stress (The Times, *ibid*). Avoid them, and also steer well clear of self-help books. All you have to do is think, and you are prodigiously capable of that. Think about your targets, plan a career: don’t let work define you – you define your work (ABA Journal, March 2004, page 61).

My point is to emphasize that while George Orwell’s tongue-in-cheek, desolate forecast has not been fulfilled these two decades on, you are yet part of a generation entangled with serious problems. The plainest is terrorism, and while that threat might not be felt acutely in this seductively tranquil part of Queensland, there are other threats also insidious and I have this morning mentioned only two: the threat that we continue, as a society, to be side-tracked by what should be only subsidiary influences, and I include an all-absorbing obsession with sport; and the risk we camouflage serious problems by captious responses: let us not resort to stress, among other things, as our excuse for failing to accomplish goals. It is unproductive to ignore reality.

George Orwell was a bit of an alarmist. As events have transpired, we may take heart against his predictions. But society remains bedevilled by major headaches.



**University of Southern Queensland Graduation Ceremony for
Faculty of Arts and the Faculty of Engineering & Surveying
Saturday 17 April 2004, 10am
Toowoomba**

You have the capacity to identify them, deal with them, and conquer them. We have dwelt for a moment this morning on the sixties, but of course you are shaping your own age, and troubles aside, it is still an age of supervening optimism and abundant capacity. I sincerely congratulate you, and wish you well.