

## **ADDRESS FOR ANNUAL PRESENTATION NIGHT AT MANSFIELD STATE HIGH SCHOOL, 7.30 PM, TUESDAY, 19 OCTOBER 2004**

Evenings like this, which celebrate the achievement of the school and the school community, its cultural and sporting groups and the excellence and success attained by individual students, generate a contagious excitement and energy, making the evening a buzz for everyone associated with it. Thank you for inviting me. It has been a privilege already to meet some of your students, teachers and parents. I look forward to meeting more of you later tonight.

When I address school-centred groups like this, I enjoy researching a little of the school's history and ethos to learn about the audience with whom I hope to engage.

Mansfield State High School takes its title from the suburb, Mansfield, after Sir Alan Mansfield, a name familiar to lawyers because he was a former Chief Justice of Queensland. My only memories of him are that when I was a school girl, he was the Governor of Queensland, a role to which he was appointed in March 1966. I have since learned that in his adult years, he lived on a 25 acre Mount Gravatt property called "Fresh Fields". Those who knew him said "Fresh Fields" summed up his attitude to life. This school, appropriately for a progressive educational institution, can be said to be, at least figuratively, built on Alan Mansfield's "Fresh Fields".

Alan Mansfield was born at Indooroopilly on 30 September 1902. He came from a distinguished legal family. His father was a District Court judge in Queensland and his great-great-grandfather had been the Chief Justice of Common Pleas in England. It seems he had a solid upbringing and home life, providing him with sound values, but he did not come from a wealthy background. He won scholarships to attend school and university in Sydney where he obtained his law degree in 1924. In those days, the only university in Queensland had no Law School. The 21 year old Alan Mansfield returned to Brisbane and became a barrister in July 1924. He shared with another young barrister rented chambers in Adelaide Street in the City. He described these chambers as a "broom cupboard" and his early months as a barrister as "unbelievably tough". He regularly had to pawn his watch on Mondays and redeem it on Fridays, that is, if somebody actually paid him for his work. His pawnbroker,

Mark Isaacs, was to become his life-long friend. Mansfield supplemented his income, or lack of it, by private tutoring and by lecturing part-time at the central technical college. He was very capable and soon developed a busy practice, mainly in the matrimonial jurisdiction. He boasted that he became successful because he grew a moustache to make himself look much older. As he aged, he shaved off his facial hair to look younger, but his upper lip was unused to the harsh Queensland light and he developed an unsightly rash; the moustache returned permanently. Alan Mansfield, like so many others, did it pretty tough during the Depression. He considered giving up law to study accountancy but continued, in his own words, "to work like a demon" on his few briefs. He rose to prominence despite the hard times. He could finally afford to marry in 1933 and he and his wife, Beryl, had a daughter and two sons. On 17 May 1940 when he was only 37 years old he was appointed a judge of the Supreme Court. After World War II the federal government nominated him as a member of the Australian Commission of Investigation into War Crimes and the United Nations War Crimes Commission in London. He was chief Australian prosecutor in 1946 and 1947 at the trials of war criminals in Tokyo before the International Military Tribunal for the Far East. In February 1956 he became Chief Justice of Queensland at a time when the Supreme Court's workload increased significantly without any corresponding increase in resources. Despite his heavy workload, he found time to contribute to many cultural, charitable, community and sporting organisations, including as chairman of the Mount Gravatt Show Society and as a member of the Greater Brisbane State Schools Committees Association, later the Queensland Council of School Organisations. He also worked for what was then the Queensland Subnormal Children's Welfare Association, Queensland Rugby Union and the Queensland Amateur Swimming Association. He was knighted in 1958 and became Governor of Queensland from 1966 until 1972. He was Chancellor of the University of Queensland from 1966 to 1976. He is remembered not only for holding high office and for his community service but also for his courtesy and consideration to others and his loyalty to good friends. The group with whom he first played poker in 1940 continued to meet for regular games until his death in 1980. And he always accepted invitations to speak at the Young Men's Hebrew Association because the requests came from Mark Isaacs, his helpful pawn broker in those early, tough days as a young barrister.

I noted with interest that your motto, displayed on the school badge and adopted from the Mansfield family crest, is "Steadfast", meaning fixed or secure in position, not to be moved or displaced, as in a soldier resolutely maintaining his ground in battle. Alan Mansfield certainly had that quality, steadfastly plugging away at his career as a barrister despite hardship, pawning his watch, retrieving it when he could, and eventually succeeding big time! Being steadfast has much to commend it.

We can all still be inspired by such a life: an early grounding in solid principles, a sound education, hard work with integrity, eventual material success and public recognition, combined with fine community service, courtesy and loyalty to deserving friends.

I was pleased to find that the colours on your school badge of teal blue and white represent the colours of the United Nations. How appropriate for a school community like this, which embraces a broad cross section of society from a wide range of socio-economic, ethnic and cultural backgrounds. It is fitting that a school with such an international outlook has developed a program of excellence in the language of international diplomacy, French, with your well-established French immersion program. And over 30 different languages are spoken in students' homes. These "Fresh Fields" have changed greatly since Alan Mansfield's day!

You may be interested to know of more recently forged close links between this area and the United Nations. I am a member of Griffith University Council and last week attended the launch of Griffith's Institute for Ethics, Governance and the Law. It has a most suitable acronym, IEGL. IEGL is a joint initiative between Griffith University and the United Nations University in Tokyo making Griffith University a United Nations University associated institution, the first in Australasia. IEGL, as its acronym suggests, has lofty, soaring goals: the development and articulation of solid values in government and public institutions, and the setting of ethical and legal standards to ensure that those values are realised. It seeks to reform institutions and to reduce corruption so that institutions work for the people. It will use its research and experience to inform others: academics, politicians, judges – so that reform becomes a continuing process. IEGL will undertake research in areas such as values and institutions for a globalising world; increasing integrity and removing corruption;

regulating corporations; environmental ethics; and civil society governance in the professions, non-government organisations and religious institutions.

At IEGL's launch, I learned that the United Nations is itself keen to refine and reform its own institutions and ensure it gives value to member states when carrying out its work for a more just and peaceful world.

The United Nations has a huge and onerous role, especially in the current world climate. I was greatly surprised to learn that the United Nations' annual budget is less than that of the University of Tokyo or the annual budget of some large municipal councils. No doubt financial difficulties are a major reason why the United Nations sometimes fails to respond quickly and adequately to world crisis situations. With the end of the Cold War, the USA has unquestionably become the single dominant world power. Whilst recognising that USA and Australian international interests and goals will frequently coincide, it is important that the world's disempowered nations have their voices heard and their human rights protected. For all its weaknesses, the United Nations is the only institution that can provide that forum and appropriate avenues for action. It is more imperative than ever that countries like Australia maintain their moral, financial and practical commitment to the United Nations and its institutions if we want to live in a peaceful and more equitable world.

I greatly admire the role models provided to students in the names of the school's four Houses: Gandhi, Hammerskjold, Schweitzer and U Thant, all outstanding workers for social justice reform and world peace. But I was gob-smacked that there were no women amongst these magnificent role models. That could not be because of any lack of renowned women who have worked for social justice and world peace. What about Eleanor Roosevelt, who was instrumental in the drafting and adoption in 1945 of that fine document, the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights? Or Mary Robinson, the first woman President of Ireland and later United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. Or Sadako Ogata, the first woman United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, a position she held from 1991-2000. What about Bertha von Suttner, the first woman awarded the Nobel Prize for World Peace, a novelist and ardent pacifist who published books on pacifism and advocated for the establishment of annual Nobel prizes for merit in physics, chemistry, medicine,

physiology, literature and world peace. Or Betty Williams, who as a Northern Ireland housewife worked for an end to conflict in Northern Ireland and, with Mairead Maguire, received the Nobel Prize for Peace in 1976. Aung San Suu Kyi, the Burmese leader of the non-violent movement for human rights and the restoration of democracy in her country also stands out. She has been under house arrest since 1989 and was awarded the Nobel Prize for Peace in 1991. Or Irene Khan, Secretary-General of Amnesty International, the first woman, the first Asian and the first Muslim to head this leading international advocacy organisation for the promotion and protection of human rights.

Next time the school's House system is re-structured, I hope it will include a House or Houses named after one or more of the many renowned women who have worked for peace and social reform.

For the grade 12 students here tonight, this evening has special significance: it is your last presentation night as school students. Next year you will continue your life journey as young adults. You have been fortunate to attend this school, built, at least figuratively, on Alan Mansfield's "Fresh Fields". It has given you opportunities to achieve high academic standards, to take part in enriching cultural and sporting activities and it has instilled sound values and expectations, opened your minds to life-long learning, and prepared you for the next important stage. In some ways, Alan Mansfield received a similarly solid grounding in Brisbane before commencing his challenging, ethical and rewarding career. In other ways, his grounding was much narrower, although no doubt appropriate enough in 1920s Australia. Unlike Alan Mansfield you have been part of a more nurturing, co-educational and multicultural school community, providing you with the inspirational goals of the United Nations and of Ghandi, Hammerskjold, Schweitzer and U Thant, a great preparation for life in 21st century Queensland and the globalised world.

Remember to make time to stop and enjoy the freshness of the daisies, life's simple joys, and to smell the roses, the beautiful and sensuous offerings of life.

What you have learned at this school will help you remain, like Alan Mansfield, steadfast, firm of purpose and ethical, committed to life-long education, working hard

with consideration and courtesy to others, valuing true friendship, and as you achieve success and happiness remember, like him, to give back to your community through volunteering. Not only does this help others, but it makes you feel good, too. It is, however, important to recognise the difference between "steadfast" and "stubborn". Steadfast is a desirable character trait; stubborn is not. As you leave these "Fresh Fields" for even fresher ones, remain steadfast, like the tall Bangalow palm, well grounded, well principled, resolutely withstanding unethical practices; be sure your roots are firm enough to provide solid support as you reach out and up to the excitement and joys of the wide world, to life and all its bountiful opportunities. Like the palm in a wild cyclone, use your roots to steadfastly hold firm to your ground, to your core principles and ethical values, in times of crisis. But do not stubbornly resist the winds of change if what they bring is not fundamentally wrong or you could be uprooted, broken and destroyed for no purpose. Like the palm, be flexible enough to withstand the many challenges and constant change of life, springing back to continue the journey upwards and out to the light. And like your great role models, Gandhi, Hammerskjold, Schweitzer and U Thant, and like Eleanor Roosevelt, Mary Robinson, Sadako Ogata, Bertha von Suttner, Betty Williams, Aung San Suu Kyi and Irene Khan, find time to lend a hand to those less fortunate and work towards a more equitable, ethical and peaceful world.

Good luck – or should that be, in the language of international diplomacy in which some at this school are immersed, Bonne Chance!