

Probus “*Some Reflections*” 2 December 2008.

Good morning Mr President and Gentlemen.

In the last 12 months I have given a couple of little talks. In these reflections today I may well repeat some anecdotes I then told. I make no apologies for them, I just ask indulgence - in much the same way that the illustrious after-dinner speaker, the late Lord Birkitt, once asked for the tolerance of his audience whilst telling an oft-repeated story.

“Gentlemen”, said the noble Lord, “I have only recounted this anecdote on two previous occasions. Once was in front of that august body, the Law Society of England. The other time was in front of the prisoners at Pentonville gaol. If anyone here present was there on either of the two previous occasions, I crave your indulgence!”

I heard Lord Burkitt speak in Sydney nearly sixty years ago. He was here as the guest of the NSW Law Society. The Society’s annual dinner was held on the seventh floor of David Jones. It was a fully subscribed black tie dinner almost entirely male. The only women present were seated at a small table in front of the long official table. The senior woman solicitor there was Veronica Pike, she and her brother Vincent were partners of a small firm specializing in Local Government law.

In due course the President of the Law Society introduced Lord Burkitt.

In reply Lord Burkitt said *“Ladies and Gentlemen, it does give me especial pleasure to welcome the Ladies with us tonight. At which the women solicitors beamed. He continued, “I remember when the first woman was admitted to practise at the Bar in England. And also I remember when the first woman was appointed a Magistrate”*. More smiles from the small table of women. Lord Burkitt then added. *“The day may well come when the first woman is appointed to the bench of my own Court”*. He paused before adding *“I hope to God by then I shall be dead!”*

I remember, as a young lawyer, feeling uncomfortable. I knew Veronica Pike as a kind person and a sound solicitor. She was a spinster to whom the practice of law was very important. She must have been hurt.

About thirty five years later I was a Judge of our Supreme Court when Jane Mathews became the first woman to be appointed to that Court in 1986. She is a fine lawyer, a delightful person and was a first class Judge. Several of us went to her Chambers following her swearing in to offer our congratulations and any assistance we may be able to give.

We found one thing troubling her was her Judicial Title. We were then all called Mr. Justice This and Mr. Justice That. She could hardly be called Miss Justice Mathews! That problem was resolved by her title being simply *Justice Mathews*. Many of us immediately dropped the **Mr** from our own titles.

The first woman to be appointed to any State Supreme Court in the Commonwealth was Dame Roma Mitchell to the South Australian Supreme Court in 1965. In 1962 Dame Roma had also been the first woman in Australia to be appointed a Queens Counsel. She was the first female to be appointed the Chancellor of an Australian University. In 1991 she was the first woman appointed a State Governor, in her case as Governor of the State of South Australia. When she became Governor, a telegram from the Attorney-General's office asked "*How old Roma Mitchell?*" To which someone (thought to be her) replied, "*Old Roma Mitchell very well. How you?*"

Now we have Quentin Bryce our first female Governor General. Marie Bashir is our own NSW State Governor. Two of the seven current Justices of the High Court of Australia are women. The most recent appointment to our NSW Supreme Court is Julie Ward, a brilliant lawyer appointed straight from the ranks of Solicitors. How the late Veronica Pike would have enjoyed that!

As is often the case New Zealand, the first country to give women the right to vote, got there before us. In 2001 at the inauguration of the first woman New Zealand Governor-General, Dame Silvia Cartwright, the other top women present were the Prime Minister, Helen Clark; the Chief Justice, Sian Elias (I understand that Sian is Welch for Jane); and the Leader of the Opposition, Jenny Shipley.

Have any of you shared my experience of sometimes looking back on an event you remember from long ago and realize that you now have a better understanding of the event because of what you've since lived through?

One such memory of mine is of an event which happened in 1932, the year I turned seven. I was a pupil at Drummoyne Public School. I was in a large class of over 40 boys. We didn't wear hats or ties or uniforms. There was one boy in the class whom I did not know well, only that his name was Ward and that he came from a large family. One day he arrived at school not wearing a shirt but what was obviously his pyjama coat. Some of the boys teased him. I felt uncomfortable but I did nothing to protect him.

Looking back years later, when I knew that 40% of men in Sydney were unemployed in 1932 and that there were no unemployment benefits only food coupons, did I realize that Ward's father was likely to have been unemployed. Probably in his large family there was just no shirt available for the boy that morning so he was sent to school in his pyjama coat.

At that time my family home in Drummoyne ran down to the Parramatta River where there was a tidal pool and a boat shed. My parents allowed two homeless men to sleep in the boat shed. They would come for an evening meal to the back door. It was only when I read *1932 A Hell of a Year* by Gerald Stone that I had a better appreciation of what was then happening.

On the river side of our house there was a narrow upstairs balcony. I slept in a bed on the balcony in summer. I thought it magical. At night you could hear the Italian fishermen singing as they pulled in their nets. At dawn you could look east past Cockatoo Island to see the sun rise behind the arches of the Harbour Bridge reaching out to join each other. The first newspaper I remember had a photo of a man being dragged from a horse at the opening of the Bridge on 19 March 1932. I'm sure there's someone here who remembers being driven across the Bridge on the day it opened.

In the middle of 1943, after turning 18, I enlisted in the Air Force. We were first posted to an Initial Training School at Bradfield Park near Lindfield Station. The place seemed to be run by Sergeant Drill Instructors. A friend, Richie Willcocks and I were in the same hut. One day there was an announcement that anyone interested in boxing or wrestling should go to the gym hut that night. Richie and I, having nothing better to do, went along. This was to prove a mistake.

On arrival we found that a boxing ring had been erected in the gym hut. In the ring was a Sgt. Drill Instructor shadow boxing whilst waiting for volunteers to arrive. He was Herb Narvo a Rugby League footballer and the

professional heavyweight boxing champion of Australia. He was preparing for his next professional fight. Richie was the first to be asked whether he boxed or wrestled. “*Box*”, he said as he had won his boxing division at Kings that year. “*Shirt off and gloves on*” he was instructed.

After a little sparring Richie landed a good straight left to Narvo’s head. Narvo, who was a stone heavier than Richie, then unleashed a flurry of heavy blows making no attempt to hold back. Richie was soon bleeding freely and the bout was stopped. Narvo was now sweating profusely. He was a south paw, I thought I saw blood dripping from his left glove.

The Instructor in charge turned to me and said “*What do you do son, box or wrestle?*” I had done a tiny bit of boxing at Grammar but had never wrestled in my life. I found myself answering “*I think I’ll wrestle tonight!*”

After Narvo had demolished a couple more volunteers, I was ordered into the ring to join Sgt. Dick Austin who wrestled professionally at Leichhardt stadium. I was quickly thrown to the canvas where Dick Austin used me to practise every wrestling grip he knew. As Richie and I left that hut we vowed we’d never volunteer again.

The next heavyweight boxer I knew was Fitzgerald, a Queensland cane cutter, whom we called Humphrey after a Joe Palooka character. Humphrey was the Amateur heavyweight boxing Champion of Australia.

At the end of 1950 the District of Canterbury based on Christchurch in the South Island of New Zealand decided to celebrate its Centenary by holding Games in a range of sports. They invited some of the world’s best athletes and quite a lot of Australian athletes who were nice and handy.

Qantas, chosen as carrier of the Australian athletes to Christchurch, decided to use the occasion to open a regular direct service from Sydney. It arranged for the inaugural flight to be greeted by the then Prime Minister Mr. Holland. I was a member of the Australian rowing VIII attending the Games and met Humphrey on the flight. Humphrey was huge, he had enormous hands. As we alighted I followed Humphrey. The New Zealand Prime Minister was on the tarmac to greet us at the bottom of the steps from the plane. The hand he extended in greeting disappeared in Humphrey’s huge paw and the PM visibly winced. He bravely held out his crushed hand to

me, I took it as gently as I could. As we went on Humphrey turned to me and said “*Who was that peanut who grabbed me ‘and back there?’*”

We were billeted in Christ College. It was the Christmas school vacation . Humphrey had his first fight on the day before Christmas. His opponent hit him freely but then, perhaps surprised that Humphrey kept doggedly advancing, stopped long enough for Humphrey to let loose a haymaker and knock him clean out of the ring.

Humphrey’s next round was to be held on Boxing Day. But the medical referees, on examining Humphrey’s two loose front teeth, declared that it was too dangerous for him to fight as the loose teeth may be knocked down his wind pipe. Humphrey promptly had a dentist remove the teeth.

I remember that Christmas luncheon. Humphrey stood up on a stout table and sang “*All I want for Christmas is my two front teeth!*”

On Boxing Day he met a far better fighter in his second bout. He remained on his feet for the three rounds but took a terrible battering. Two years later he died of multiple brain haemorrhages. He was only twenty five. I never watched another boxing match!

It was in Christchurch that I was first confronted by the New Zealand Haka. I thought it only happened at Rugby matches. But not a bit of it. The New Zealanders had invited the US Navy VIII, the “Golden Bears”, who had won the Gold Medal in the 1948 London Olympics. As we and the Americans approached the pontoon to boat on the opening day of the Rowing we found our way blocked by the NZ crew. The New Zealanders performed a great Haka with arms and legs pumping and tongues and eyes protruding.

On returning to our billets that night we decided to respond in the morning with a Haka of our own. But how could we compose and learn the words in time? Our seven man, Edward Oscar Guthrie Pain, suggested we chant our initials starting from our coxswain at the stern. It began TAC, PAC, EOGP, MDF. We used the initials of our bow Robert Noel Patrick Tinning (RNPT) as our chorus. When we performed it on the following morning it quite mystified the New Zealanders and Lord knows what the Americans made of it!

Our next chartered Qantas trip was on the 14th of June 1952. The Helsinki Olympics were due to open on 19th of July . The AOC decided to fly the rowers, swimmers, track and field athletes and the cyclists to England for some pre-Olympic competition.

John Landy the great Australian miler who later held the World records for the mile and 1500 metres was a passenger. He had an eccentric coach Percy Cerrutti who had him running up and down sand hills and spouted philosophy to him. Cerrutti told Landy that, to avoid jet lag, he should lie in the aisle at night with a towel wrapped around his head! There was only one central aisle in the Qantas constellations of those days. When the lights went out John Landy dutifully laid down in the aisle with a towel around his head.

When anyone got up in the front to visit the toilet at the rear of the plane cries went up “*Look out for Landy*”. In 2000 Landy was appointed Governor of Victoria. In 2001 another passenger on that plane, Marjorie Jackson, was appointed Governor of the adjoining State, South Australia. Marjorie met her husband-to-be the cyclist Peter Nelson on the same flight.

It was a four day flight to London as we had to return to Singapore due to engine failure. We thought this a bonus, Qantas paid for the extra night, and, to our joy, put us up in the wonderful old ***Raffles Hotel*** ! There were stable doors to the interior rooms and ceiling punkahs to cool us!

On arrival in London the rowers were bussed directly to Henley- on- Thames. We were billeted there and trained from the Leander Rowing Club. We raced in the wonderful Henley Regatta, which is the oldest rowing regatta in Europe inaugurated in 1839.

Many of you will know Henley and some, no doubt, have rowed there. It's a beautiful stretch of water. The races start from Temple Island and finish at the stewards enclosure. How far is that? Well, it's the distance from Temple Island to the Stewards enclosure! It just happens to be a little longer than the Olympic race distance of 2000 metres.

The Henley Regatta is to an oarsman is what Wimbledon is to a tennis player or Lords is to a cricketer. Before the Regatta the lovely white swans who live on that stretch of water are caught and released on another stretch of water a couple of locks higher up, Wooden booms are laid end to end on

each side of the course. The course itself is only wide enough for two crews to race abreast requiring a huge number of heats. The Regatta is spread over five days. It's held annually in the first week of July.

Just past the finishing line is the historic *Leander Rowing Club*. Its membership consists of distinguished oarsmen from the UK and overseas. You can tell a Leander man by his salmon pink socks and his salmon pink bow tie! He may also wear a similarly coloured cap. Leander kindly allowed us to boat from their Club. Nations are not allowed to compete as such in the Henley Regatta. Our VIII entered as the Sydney Rowing Club. The GB Olympic VIII entered as the Leander Club.

You will remember that John Howard was not the first Australian sitting Prime Minister to lose his own seat at a general election. In the general elections of 1929 Stanley Melbourne Bruce, who had been Prime Minister since 1923 lost his seat (although he regained it at the next election).

Stanley Bruce had attended Melbourne Grammar as a boy. He then went onto Cambridge University where he won a rowing blue and was elected a member of the Leander Club.

He served with distinction in the 1st World War and was awarded the Military Cross and the Croix de Guerre. On leaving politics he served as High Commissioner in London from 1933 to 1945. He represented Australia at meetings of Churchill's war cabinet. In 1947 the UK Government appointed him to the House of Lords as 1st Viscount Bruce of Melbourne to be addressed as Lord Bruce.

In 1952 we knew little of this. Early in our Henley stay we were standing by our rowing shell which was on slings in front of the Leander Club. An affable gentleman wearing his salmon pink socks and bow tie approached us. We had no idea he was a former Australian Prime Minister now Lord Bruce. "*As a fellow Australian I'd like to welcome you to the Leander Club*" he said adding, as he held out his hand to our big five man, Geoffrey Williamson *I'm Bruce*. Geoffrey took his hand, smiled and replied with a laconic Australian drawl, "*G'day Bruce, I'm Geoff*".

Some of you film buffs will remember the Western classic *High Noon* which first screened that year 1952. It starred Gary Cooper and the beautiful young actress Grace Kelly. This was 4 years before her marriage to Prince

Rainier of Monaco in 1956. Grace Kelly attracted much attention on the river bank that Henley as she watched her brother Jack in the Diamond sculls. He got to the final where he was beaten by the Australian Mervyn Wood, who had won the gold medal for sculling in the previous Olympics.

Jack Kelly's father, John Brendan Kelly, started his career as a bricklayer's apprentice. He went on to become a multi millionaire owning brickworks throughout America. He was a great sculler in his day and won the American sculling championship in 1920. However his application to row at Henley in 1920 in the Diamond Sculls was rejected. The definition of "Amateur" in the Henley Regatta rules of the day excluded any artisan or motor mechanic. A bricklayer just didn't qualify

Kelly however was able to row for America the following month in the 1920 Olympic Games in Antwerp. There he won the Gold medal in the sculls defeating the English Champion, Jack Beresford, in the final. Beresford had won the Diamond sculls at Henley. It is said that Kelly immediately sent his Kelly green racing cap to King George V with a note reading "*Greetings from an American bricklayer*"! The definition of Amateur in the Henley Regatta rules was changed in the 1930s.

The Helsinki Olympic Games, held 56 years ago, lie just half way between the First Games of the modern era in Athens in 1896 and the XXIX Olympic Games in Beijing last August. All the Australian representatives were then amateurs. But in 1952 the USSR and its 14 Communist allies joined the Olympic movement for the first time. The Soviet participation introduced a new type of athlete, they trained full time and were wholly supported by the State, they came to be called *State Amateurs*. Amateur athletes from many countries found it difficult to compete against these virtually full time athletes.

Eventually in 1986 the Olympic Charter was changed to delete all reference to *Amateur*, and allow "*all the world's great male and female athletes to participate*"

You may ask where did Australian athletes, who had sporting scholarships at the American Universities, stand as amateurs. We had three great swimmers, Garrick Agnew, John Marshall and John Davies attending American Universities with sporting scholarships in 1952. But they were genuine students also attending courses. John Davies, who won the Gold medal for

Australia in the 200m breaststroke at Helsinki, graduated in Law from Michigan University. He married an American, settled in the States where he was later appointed a Federal Court Judge. He presided over a couple of the difficult race riot trials.

Helsinki had been promised the 1940 Games and London the Games of 1944. The 2nd World War of course caused both of them to be cancelled. After the War the IOC reversed the order giving London the 1948 Games and Helsinki the XV Games of 1952. Helsinki had a population of only 400,000. The USSR did not want its athletes to live in the Olympic Village, Kapyla, where they may fraternize with athletes of other countries. It proposed flying its athletes daily from Leningrad to compete. This was not acceptable to the Olympic authorities. Compromise was reached, the village which was to have been used by female Olympians was conceded to the Soviet bloc countries. The women were housed elsewhere, our Australian women athletes in Nurses Quarters.

In the case of the Russian rowers, they lived on a Russian ship moored in mid-Harbour. They were ferried by tender each day to the boat sheds on the harbour's edge for training.

The USSR denied permission for the Olympic torch to be carried through some of the territories it had recently annexed. The torch had to be carried over the Artic circle, through Sweden to Finland. There was a crowd of 70,000 for the opening ceremony when the Olympic torch was carried into the Stadium by the great distance runner Paavo Nurmi, who had won nine Olympic gold medals for Finland in the 1920s.

Unhappily Finland won no gold in the track and field in 1952 and only one bronze. The Australian men track and field athletes won no medals. John Treloar's sixth place in the final of the men's 100m being their best result. The first six finished within one tenth of a second of each other. But in the Women's events the marvellous Marjorie Jackson won Gold in the 100m and the 200m sprints both in World record time. Shirley Strickland won Gold in the 80m hurdles and bronze in the 100m sprint.

Our rowing VIII in those days tended to seat its shorter men in the bow and stern seats and its taller, bigger men were in the centre of the boat. Our bow was Bob Tinning who had just finished Medicine, he was later to be one of our leading orthopaedic surgeons. Bob was a beautiful oar but was only 5ft

10in. He saw a huge American oarsman on the river bank, he was about 6ft 6in and built in proportion, Bob went up to him and said “*Hi, I’m Bob the Australian bow. I guess you would be the American five man?*” The towering American smiled down at Bob, held out his hand, and said “*Hell no Bob, I’m Hank and I’m bow too!*”

The crew for whom I felt most sorry at Helsinki was a Japanese IV. It was the first Olympics in which Japan had entered a rowing crew. They were shorter than most other crews, perhaps due to poor war time diets. Their oars were designed with a short outboard blade enabling them to start with an exceptionally high rating. We could see them practising their racing starts on their own on the other side of the harbour. What mystified us was they practised with a starting gun. Starting guns were commonly used in Regattas around the world but not in the Olympics at that time.

The Olympic rowing races were then started by voice in French, the language of Baron de Coubertin. So, “*Are you ready, Go*” became *Etes vous pret, Partez*” In the heat with the Japanese IV, all the others partezed whilst the unfortunate Japanese crew were left waiting for the gun.

The wonderful Czech runner Emile Zatopek was the outstanding athlete of those Games winning the 5,000m, the 10,000m and then the Marathon. The rowing had finished by the time he ran the 10,000m enabling us to be in the stadium to see him run. He had a curious action with his head wobbling from side to side. He didn’t run an even pace but would surge to the lead then slow down. The lead pack didn’t know quite what to do. Eventually they would pass him only for Zatopek to surge to the lead again and slow down again. Finally he went to the lead about a lap and a half from the finish but this time he didn’t slow down. As he came into the finishing straight he had a huge lead and was ahead of the world record. The entire stadium audience, including us, rose to its feet and chanted *Zat o pec, Zat o pec, Zat o pec*. It was unforgettable. On the same day as his 5000m victory, his wife Dana won the gold medal in the Javelin.

When the Games finished Ted Pain (our 7 man) and I each had a few weeks to spare. Ted before going up to Oxford for a BCL, and I, to board the Himalaya for home. We used the time to hitch-hike down Europe to see *San Michele*, Axel Munthe’s villa on Anna Capri.

I never rowed again. But Ted rowed at Oxford he was one of the four Australians in the Oxford crew which won the Centenary Oxford and Cambridge boat race in 1954. Jim McLeod, the Emeritus Professor of Medicine at Sydney University, whom many of you will know, was another of the Australians in that Oxford crew as was Jim Gobbo who was the Governor of Victoria immediately before John Landy.