

## Chapter 7

### Toast to the Hon Murray Gleeson\*

President, gentlemen: we know our guest tonight to be the most clubbable and convivial of members—a great raconteur, patiently enduring the less witty longueurs of others.

But this testimonial dinner—a token of our admiration and gratitude for his service to the nation—is being held to celebrate other qualities.

Now human qualities, apart from those springing from the autonomous human spirit, stem largely from the factors of heredity or environment. So far as heredity is concerned, on the maternal side, Anthony Murray Gleeson takes descent from the Murrays. There are Murrays scattered all over Scotland. From which branches does he hail? Does he come from the Highlands, with their wild and varied beauty, and their tragic and romantic history? Does he share the obsession of the more savage clans with their ancient feuds and massacres, like the Campbells and the McDonalds? At the Festival of Britain in 1951 it was planned to have a gathering of the clans at Murrayfield in Edinburgh. But in what order should they enter? Someone suggested: “Alphabetical”. One of the McDonalds objected, on the ground that it would be scandalous if the McDonalds had to come in behind the Campbells. Another McDonald disagreed. He said: “I think it’s much better for us to come in just behind the Campbells than for the Campbells to come in just behind us”.

Or do our guest’s forbears spring from more stolid regions, having an intense interest in parochial affairs, for example Dundee, where the local newspaper published the news that the *Titanic* had sunk under the large headline: “Dundee Man Lost At Sea”?

On the paternal side our guest’s forebears came from Ireland. But in him we see no signs of the lateral thinking for which the Irish are famous—like the Dubliner who, in the days before modern sewerage systems, remarked that the smell of the Liffey was one of the sights of Dublin.

The first 24 years of our guest’s life were spent at Wingham, with primary education at Wingham Convent School, followed by St Joseph’s College, the University of Sydney Law School, and work at Murphy and Moloney, before he came to the Bar. Some journalists have seen this as a “narrative”, as they call it now, equivalent to the sort of struggle against crippling disadvantage which modern politicians, or at least their press secretaries, urge on the public, with reciprocal claims that “my father’s log cabin had a lot more holes in the roof than your father’s log cabin”.

In fact those first 24 years afforded an excellent education for the career which he chose.

Taking those events in reverse order, he would not have had speedy success at the Bar without some training at Murphy and Moloney. By modern standards, no doubt, it was a small firm. But why was it then the worse for that? Why would it be now the

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\* Testimonial Dinner, Australian Club, 30 October 2008.

This is a preview. Not all pages are shown.