

## Chapter Nine

### Some Words of Thanks

John Stone

I should begin by thanking our Conference Convenor, Julian Leeser, for granting me the privilege of these few minutes before our Conference proper resumes, to say a few words in response to the two papers you heard yesterday in the *festschrift* segment of our program.

In doing so I speak not only on my own behalf but also on Nancy's.

Those of you who were at our Adelaide conference a year ago, or who have since read the relevant portions of the Proceedings of that conference – Volume 21 of *Upholding the Australian Constitution* – will know who we have to blame for the idea of this *festschrift*. I refer to the same man whom I have just thanked for allowing me this privilege – namely, Julian Leeser. As he said when announcing it in Adelaide, he “had done the numbers” among the Board of Management, and there was no way I could hope to reverse their decision.

That did not stop me from trying, subsequently, to do so. But Julian, who is an infinitely better politician than I could ever hope to be, continued to “have the numbers”.

Having said that by way of preface, let me now strike a different note.

However little I may have welcomed this development, it would be nothing short of churlish if I were to fail to acknowledge the generous sentiments that I know inspired it – not only on Julian's part, but on the part of all the other members of the Board of Management.

And it would be worse than churlish – it would be downright ill-mannered – if I were not also to acknowledge the time, and effort, that both Des Moore and Mr Justice Heydon clearly devoted to their respective efforts yesterday.

Des Moore, of course, is one of my oldest friends. In 1958, when, as a rather junior Treasury officer, I had been sent to London to serve as the Australian Treasury Representative in Australia House, and he was studying at the London School of Economics, he came to see me. I soon thereafter recommended his appointment to the Treasury – from which, 28 years later, he resigned his Deputy Secretary position. His whole life, both up to that time and ever since, has been one of public service.

Dyson Heydon, if I may be so familiar, is a friend of much shorter standing. We only met in Sydney seven or eight years ago after our move there from Melbourne, and not long before his elevation to the High Court bench of which he is now such an adornment. To have enjoyed his friendship since that time has been both an honour and a privilege.

Other than in one particular, I have no intention this morning of commenting on the substance of what Des said yesterday afternoon or what Dyson said at dinner last night. That exception is to express my gratitude to Dyson – and here I speak on my *personal* behalf – for the fact that he chose to entitle his address *The Public Life of John and Nancy Stone*. I repeat, “and Nancy” Stone.

It will not surprise anyone in this room, I think, when I say that I could speak volumes about the loving support I have been so fortunate to receive from Nancy throughout the now 56 years of our married lives. Whatever small things I may (or may not) have achieved along that road, the one thing that I do know is that none of them could have been achieved without her. So thank you, Dyson, for what you had to say last night in gracious recognition of that undeniable fact.

At this point of my remarks I confess to harbouring, for once, a fellow feeling for Kevin Rudd. You will remember that, during the course of his farewell remarks outside the Prime Minister's office in

Canberra to the assembled media, he admitted at one point that he was “on the point of blubbing”. His understandable emotional stress then was evident, and I fear that mine may be equally so now.

Now let me conclude by saying a few things, briefly, about this Society. It does not seem like more than 18 years since we began. Our only asset then was the fact that the Rt Hon Sir Harry Gibbs – not long retired as Chief Justice of the High Court – had accepted my invitation to become our inaugural President. A few months later he was to deliver (albeit, as it turned out, vicariously) a superb inaugural address to our first Conference, in July 1992, at the Hilton Hotel in Melbourne.

There have been times, throughout those years, when Nancy and I have looked at each other and wondered whether, in reality, anything at all was being accomplished. But I hope we are not deceiving ourselves – or you – when I say that today, small though the achievements may have been within the great totality of things, nevertheless something *has* been achieved. And now that the running of the Society is in much younger – and so much more capable – hands, we feel that even more strongly.

Throughout those 18 years we have enjoyed not merely the intellectual stimulus of all the speakers – including the two I have already mentioned – who have given so generously of their time to come and grace our meetings, but also – and even more lastingly – the wonderful company of like-minded people who have made up our membership. Not a few of the people in this room today were “present at the creation”, and Nancy and I have enjoyed their friendship, and that of all those who came later, to a degree that has enriched our lives.

So thank you, Des; thank you, Dyson; and even – though perhaps somewhat grudgingly – thank you, Julian! And last, but not least, thank you all.