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Law Council
OF AUSTRALIA

Ceremonial Sitting of the Federal Court of Australia to welcome The Honourable Justice Jane Needham

Speech delivered by Juliana Warner, President-elect of the Law Council of Australia at the Federal Court of Australia, Sydney.

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May it please the Court.

I respectfully acknowledge that this ceremony takes place on the traditional lands of the Gadigal people of the Eora Nation and I pay my respects to their Elders both past and present, and extend that respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people here today.

I also acknowledge the Attorney-General, the Hon Mark Dreyfus KC MP; The Honourable Justice Berna Collier; Mr Michael Izzo SC, Junior Vice-President of the New South Wales Bar Association and representing the Australian Bar Association; Mr Dominic Toomey SC, Senior Vice-President of the New South Wales Bar Association; all judicial officers, dignitaries, family, friends, and, most of all: Your Honour.

It is an honour and a great pleasure to represent the Law Council of Australia at this ceremony to welcome Your Honour's appointment and extend to you the congratulations and best wishes of the profession. I seem to be outnumbered by barristers who are speaking at the Bar table today so I think I will even up the score a bit by noting that I am also representing the Law Society of NSW and I am here to congratulate you on behalf of the 42,230 solicitors holding active practicing certificates in this great State.

One of the many, many things that I admire about Your Honour is that you have been an outspoken and tireless champion of diversity, inclusion and equality within our profession. Throughout your career you have carved a path for other women to follow and supported many female lawyers on their journey.

We have heard today that you are following in your father's footsteps. I understand that it was through Your Honour working as an associate to your father in the Supreme Court that the legal profession was lucky enough to attract your attention and dedication.

But I would also like to pay tribute to your mother. Your mother, then Anne Cunningham, was a solicitor at the venerable firm of Allen, Allen & Hemsley in the 1950's – only the second woman lawyer there. In those days that was quite exceptional. She must have been a trailblazer at that time. Many women of her generation left their careers early, for a variety of reasons, but went on to raise little girls who grew up, like Your Honour, determined to make a change. So, it is hardly surprising that you have been such a champion for women lawyers. I expect that your mother was a huge source of inspiration for you.

With your appointment, you will continue to inspire the next generation within our profession or those considering a career in the law.

However, in the early days, your interest in the law had to do battle with your love of literature. Your original field of study was of course Mediaeval English – a degree you have noted was interesting but fairly impractical in terms of career prospects. But in switching to the law you did not leave your love of literature behind. In your 2021 Sir Anthony Mason Oration you spoke on literature in the law, particularly the use of literary quotes in judgments.

Of the use of literature by judges, Your Honour said you believe its use is "to make judgments more readable, to illustrate a point, or to demonstrate that some aspect of human behaviour has been dealt with in literature and is thus, perhaps, less surprising or unusual. It is the touchstone of a common experience, seeking to include the reader in a shared knowledge and familiarity."

You lamented the lack of modern texts and Australian and female authors referred to – a deficiency you will no doubt now address in spades.

Your Honour has already served our profession, and the people of Australia, in so many ways.

From your Presidency of the NSW Bar Association and your implementation of the equitable briefing policy and emergency child care for members of the Bar; to fearlessly speaking out against bullying and harassment; through to helming some of the largest succession matters that have been heard in this country.

Even before your much deserved appointment to this Court, Your Honour had established an enduring legacy – a legacy that goes far beyond the courtroom.

It is a legacy built on the success of the many lawyers, both men and women, you have personally mentored; the difference you have made for so many as an advocate for work life balance; and the lawyers who have chosen the law and remained in our profession because of the example you have set and the changes you have wrought.

You are a great role model. And, if I may be so bold, I would also add that you are a very stylish one – you do a great line in well cut black dresses and pearls!

You have a very full life and particularly a very full home life centred around your three amazing and talented 'Darlings'. I well remember you telling me about the highs - and the odd low - of home schooling young teenage boys during the pandemic lockdown! I am sure your Darlings could not be more proud of you today.

You are definitely a 'home and hearth' girl – you love to cook and like many good cooks with a generous spirit you are a 'feeder' – one of your juniors says there was always an offering of delicious food when he came to your place to work.

You have also famously been a carer for a menagerie of animals in need, ranging from fish, to lizards, rabbits, and cats and dogs – and once even a fruit bat. But now you have your 2 cats – Hermes – who I think can best be described as a cat with attitude - and Hades who you describe as your good cat!

And of course you are still a great reader. One of your favorite treats is heading off for an eco-friendly tiny house getaway somewhere gorgeous in the bush with a stack of really good books; or heading off to Lady Elliot Island Eco Resort - also with a stack of really good books to read.

You are also a 'wordle' fiend with a much better track record than I have.

I understand that in the past you had a passion for horses and time spent getting out on the land and riding. But in more recent times you have taken up bike riding as well, including (and I am in awe of this) multi-day bike rides. Very impressive, you must be very fit and that is probably what doing Dry July does for you – although I understand that this year Dry July is going to be deferred to Dry August because of all the richly deserved celebrations this month.

Your Honour, you have already made such a difference for the better. You are compassionate, you have an ability to get to the root of a problem and solve it, you have great attention to detail, and a passion and commitment for service. I know you will be an excellent judge and you will put these qualities to work for the benefit of those who come before you in this Court.

Your Honour, on behalf of the legal profession, I congratulate you on your appointment and thank you for your continued service to our community.

May it please the Court.

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