

**Address on the occasion of the retirement of The Honourable
Justice Bernard Teague from the Supreme Court of Victoria on
Thursday 14 February 2008 by Peter Riordan S.C., Chairman of
the Victorian Bar Council**

If the Court pleases.

There is more than an air of unreality about a farewell to Your Honour Justice Bernard Teague.

I'm sure that in 1979 the powers that be, at the Law Institute's Retiring President's Dinner, said nice things about Your Honour secure in the knowledge that they had seen the last of Bernard Teague. To stand again for President would involve another 5 years of elections and executive meetings and another round of holding office as immediate past president, treasurer, vice president, president and immediate past president.

They grossly underestimated Your Honour if they thought you would be a retiring workhorse because rather you were like an excited child who, having just come off the big dipper, immediately went to the back of the queue and said I want to do it all over again.

After you completed your second term as President, the powers that be did not make the same mistake again. They worked out that the only way of finally disposing of Your Honour was to get you appointed to the Supreme Court.

The first practising solicitor to be appointed to the Supreme Court. An extraordinary honour for an extraordinary man.

I may be wrong, but I don't think that, after you retire from the Supreme Court, you were allowed to go back and start all over again – not unless your name is Pagone.

My doubts about the certainty of this farewell arise from the fact that there is no discernable reduction in Your Honour's energy levels, for which you are notorious. During the many years that you were involved with the Law Institute, it was legend that your wife, Patrice, would throw you out of bed at 4am in the morning and you would pedal your way into the city along Swan Street in the dark avoiding garbage trucks.

Some may have expected you to sleep in to 5am, when you were elevated to the Superior Court of this state – but you didn't.

Not only did you throw yourself into your new judicial role with the same vigour you had displayed as the senior litigation solicitor of Corrs, but, deprived of your extracurricular activities on the Law Institute, you found a whole new world of distractions to avoid your gardening duties.

- You were on the Council and Board of the Australian Institute of Judicial Administration for 6 years.
- You were the inaugural Chair of the AIJA Education Committee and played a key role in the establishment of the Australia wide Judicial Orientation Program.
- You were the convenor of the AIJA Technology for Justice Conference in 1998.
- Your substantial contributions were recognised in 2004 with life membership of the AIJA.
- You were a member of the International Bar Association for more than 20 years and on its organising committee for its 1994 Melbourne convention – the first IBA biennial conference held in Australia.
- You played a key role on the organising committee of the 2003 Commonwealth Law Association Conference in Melbourne. Using personal contacts, you persuaded many senior overseas judges to make the trip to Melbourne.

And of course, as had been your Law Institute Council service, all of this was over and above the more than full time commitment to your work on the Court.

Assuming, as I think we can, that Patrice will not tolerate you interfering with her business of coaching senior management professionals in public speaking and communications, one cannot help but conclude that from here-on some other institution will be shaken up, reformed and generally knocked into shape as the subject of Your Honour's attention.

On a personal note, may I say how much I, as a young solicitor, learned under your tutelage (together with the other fast talking city lawyers, Miles, Dunn and Lewis), in my time as a member of the Law Institute Council.

Your drive and reformist zeal on the Council was to me an eye opening experience. Not to mention how impressed I was with the foresight that you and Gordon Lewis were able to display in quadrupling the insurance on the Law Institute building 3 weeks before the fire.

It was a truly enjoyable experience sitting around the Law Institute Council table with you and others plotting revenge on the Bar for burning down our building and for generally being the repository of all things evil.

But life has moved on and I have to say my views about the Bar have mellowed a bit from those heady days.

Your Honour responded to the challenge of being the first and only practising solicitor to be appointed as a Judge of this Court in your own inimitable way. Your Honour was one of the most experienced and highly regarded litigation lawyers in the state, particularly in the areas of defamation and personal injury. However, it could have been said that Your Honour did not have a great deal of experience in the criminal area.

In fact Your Honour has remarked that the first time you set foot in a criminal court, it was to see a murder trial – and you were the Judge.

However, there was never any doubt that Your Honour's work ethic and intelligence, not to mention your pragmatism and deep concern for fairness, would ensure that you would meet the challenges in this Court. In fact, since 2001 you have been the principal Judge of the criminal division of this Court.

It would be remiss of me not to mention that the Bar is grateful for Your Honour's tireless work in ensuring that our Supreme Court has adopted the reforms and efficiencies (as has been mentioned by the Solicitor General) to ensure that it remains the pre-eminent Supreme Court in this country.

On behalf of the Victorian Bar, I thank you for your contributions to the Victorian legal profession and to this Court.