



VICTORIAN BAR

WELCOME

**ADDRESS AT THE WELCOME TO
HIS HONOUR JUDGE GEORGE GEORGIU,
JUDGE OF THE COUNTY OF VICTORIA
IN THE COUNTY OF VICTORIA
IN COURT 3-3 OF THE COUNTY COURT ON
THURSDAY, 9 MAY AT 9:15AM
BY WENDY HARRIS QC,
VICE-PRESIDENT OF THE VICTORIAN BAR**

May it please the Court.

I appear on behalf of the Australian Bar Association and the Victorian Bar to congratulate Your Honour on your appointment to this Court.

I also acknowledge the traditional owners and custodians of the land on which we meet, the Peoples of the Kulin Nation, and pay my respects to their elders past and present.

Your Honour's appointment to this Court has been greeted with much admiration by your colleagues and friends, and in particular by members of the Victorian Bar.

Your Honour was born in Bristol, England, the son of Cypriot parents. You lived in the UK until you were aged 3. It was then that your family moved to the Western Suburbs of Melbourne.

Your Honour went to school at Paisley High School (now Bayside Secondary College) in Newport before moving to East Burwood in Year 11, where you completed your HSC at Burwood Heights High School.

Your Honour really enjoyed science at school and so you enrolled in a Bachelor of Economics degree at Monash University. You Honour had not considered becoming a lawyer until a chance encounter with a friend at university who was studying law; your Honour thought that what you had discussed sounded so interesting that you transferred to a joint Bachelor of Laws and Economics, graduating in 1985.

The following year, your Honour accepted a position at Maurice Blackburn & Co (now Maurice Blackburn) to undertake articles. You were admitted to practice in 1987 and remained as a solicitor at Maurice Blackburn & Co until then end of 1988. You gained experience working in personal injury, common law and workers' compensation matters.

However, you were to be bitten by the travel bug and your Honour spent the next 2 years travelling through Asia and Europe. During that time your Honour spent a year working in London as a law clerk at the firm, Gough, Clinton and Broom. It was here that your Honour was first exposed to criminal law where you developed a deep passion for it.



In 1990, your Honour returned to Melbourne and was called to the Bar, developing a practice in criminal law over the next 4 years. You gained a reputation as a very capable, considered advocate; incredibly empathetic to your clients with a strong sense of social justice.

It was not long before your Honour again succumbed to “itchy feet”. After 4 years in Melbourne, your Honour was keen to follow in the footsteps of the many members of the Bar who have devoted their time and energy to practising in the Northern Territory. So, when in 1994 fellow barrister Charlie Rozencwajg (now Magistrate Rozencwajg) alerted your Honour to a locum opportunity in Alice Springs, you jumped at the chance. It was meant to be an eight week stint. It was to be seven years before Your Honour would return to Melbourne, having taken up the position of the Principle Legal Officer for the Northern Territory Legal Aid Commission in Alice Springs.

Your Honour found yourself captivated by the Northern Territory and Alice Springs in particular, falling in love with the scenery and the environment; “an ugly town in a beautiful setting”. Driven by your Honour’s commitment to social justice issues it was an eye opening experience; of note were the problems in the Indigenous community, giving your Honour the opportunity to represent clients who had truly suffered incredible deprivation in their lives. Although the work was hard, your Honour took enormous satisfaction from it.

A major challenge was overcoming language and cultural barriers when representing Indigenous Australians; clients were reluctant to give evidence for cultural reasons, and the issue of ‘gratuitous concurrence’ (where assent is given to every proposition put to the witness even when they do not agree) caused no end of difficulty in cross-examination. There is no doubt your Honour’s advocacy skills benefited from these experiences. The Indigenous Australian community represent a people who, in your Honour’s words, have suffered “a lot of injustices, a lot of prejudice, a lot of racism, a lot of poverty”. Despite your consciousness of the hardship prevalent in that community, your Honour found solace in the fact that you did what you could to help. It was as simple as that.

Your Honour returned to Melbourne in 2001, taking up the position of Senior Public Defender for Victoria Legal Aid, a position in which you remained for 6 years. In August 2007, your Honour returned to the Bar and picked up your practice as a criminal barrister. Your Honour became known for taking on lengthy and legally complex trials.

Your Honour has acted in some very significant matters: in R v Neal, Victoria’s first case involving a charge of deliberately infecting another with HIV; acting for three survivors before the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse when the Commission conducted hearings into the Retta Dixon Home in Darwin; and for the accused in the 2015 Anzac Day terrorism plot.

Your Honour’s last big matter as a barrister was in the ‘Eastman’ trial in the Australian Capital Territory, which consumed the final 2 years of your Honour’s time at the Bar. Your Honour acted for David Eastman, who spent nearly 20 years in jail for being convicted of killing a senior AFP police officer. Pre-trial argument occupied some 40 days (over a period of some 18 months resulting in approximately 35 Rulings) and the trial, with a jury, ran for a little over 5 months. Pre-trial argument dealt with complex areas of law including legal professional privilege; public interest immunity; tendency and coincidence; admissibility of hearsay; admissibility of listening device recordings and many other discrete evidentiary matters.



Your client was a difficult person and had a history of sacking his advisors. Your Honour displayed empathy and care for your client's needs, making sure that he understood what was going on, always consulting him. The outcome was that your Honour's client was acquitted of murder; an immeasurably significant, life-changing outcome after nearly 20 years imprisonment.

Your Honour is described as extremely polite, yet very persuasive; "disarmingly avuncular" in fact. You are very hard working and an accomplished leader; incredibly skilled at managing complex cases and fearless in the face of that complexity. Whether it is a 'not-guilty verdict' or arguing about the appropriateness of a sentence, your Honour has always been driven by one primary concern; to ensure a fair trial and to achieve a good outcome for your client.

Your Honour's commitment to social justice issues is also evident in your contribution to Liberty Victoria. Your Honour succeeded Jane Dixon SC (now Justice Jane Dixon of the Supreme Court of Victoria) as President in late 2014 and served in that role for 2 years. Your Honour used the high profile platform to defend and campaign for civil liberties and human rights.

Your Honour's contribution to the profession of the independent Bar is noteworthy; as a Committee Member and a Member of the Criminal Bar Association throughout your career; as a mentor to seven readers; and providing assistance to the Bar Readers' course in its moot court. Your Honour has given a great deal of time in teaching the profession as an advocacy instructor for the Australian Advocacy Institute and as a sessional teaching associate for Monash University's advocacy program in 2014 and 2015.

The Northern Territory made a huge impression on your Honour, with you travelling back to visit the great friends that you made there as often as you can. Your Honour's great love of Western Desert Aboriginal art developed during your time in the NT, having been introduced to it by Justice David Angel, formerly of the Supreme Court of the Northern Territory (and now retired). From that developed your Honour's love of modern art. Much of your Honour's spare time was spent viewing, and occasionally purchasing, the great art at the Papunya Tula Gallery, in Todd Mall. I am told that your Honour has a remarkable collection of art that hangs on the walls of your Honour's home, and indeed your chambers.

Your Honour is a dedicated family man and your partner, Julie, and your son Daniel are here in court today to celebrate with you. Julie, on seeing your Honour off on your locum placement in Alice Springs, perhaps did not expect to be joining you. But when it became clear that your Honour had fallen in love with the place and had set down roots, Julie moved up to the Alice to join you and Daniel was born there. You both share a love of camping and bush walking which you were able to do plenty of and explore the magnificent country of the top end.

Your Honour is a member of a Very Serious Book Club; reading the book is entirely optional but the provision of a fine bottle of wine and lively discussion about politics and world events is not!

Your Honour is a proud and passionate Collingwood supporter, going to as many games as possible. It is something your Honour will no doubt reinvigorate, now that you are no longer spending so much time traveling to the ACT. Despite your Honour's love of the desert, it did put paid to your Honour's budding skiing career. Perhaps this is just as well, as your Honour is no fan of the Melbourne Football Club.



On behalf of the Australian Bar Association and the Victorian Bar, I warmly congratulate Your Honour, and I wish you long, satisfying, and distinguished service as a Judge of this Court.

May it please the Court.