

**REMARKS BY THE HONOURABLE PETER UNDERWOOD AC,  
GOVERNOR OF TASMANIA, TO OPEN THE 2014 ROTARY  
DISTRICT 9830 CONFERENCE, DEVONPORT,**

**FRIDAY 11<sup>TH</sup> APRIL 2014.**

Thank you very much for asking me to open the 2014 Conference of Rotary District 9830. At the outset, I would like to express my appreciation to the Launceston Rotary Club for following up on my urging at a recent dinner to celebrate the 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Rotary in Tasmania by getting involved in the 26TEN programme to help improve the functional literacy levels in this State. I understand that on 1<sup>st</sup> April John Richardson and Jess Panday from LINC in Launceston gave the Club a short presentation on the 26TEN programme, and spoke about the current literacy and learning opportunities that are available at the Launceston LINC. I am told that it was a fruitful session with offers of support and suggestions that Rotary in Tasmania really get behind the 26TEN programme. Well done Rotarians. I also wish to thank the Mayor of Launceston's wife, Mrs Lyndle van Zetten, who is a teacher by profession and who also took up the challenge and has volunteered to be a tutor in the programme. Congratulations and keep up the good work to eradicate functional illiteracy in this State.

When I sat down to write something for this evening, I looked back over my files and realised that this is the sixth time that I have had the privilege of addressing Rotarians from District 9380. It is, of course, very flattering to have been asked to open four conferences and to speak at the 90<sup>th</sup>

anniversary dinner, but I need to warn you that my stock of jokes is limited and I know that Rotarians enjoy a good joke, and some even feel cheated if the speaker does not tell one. This year, to avoid the risk of repetition, and to avoid any of you feeling cheated, I looked back over the notes that I made during my 24 years as a Judge of our Supreme Court. As I did so, I recalled a conversation I had with a colleague from another State at a conference we were both attending. He told me that he had just come back from sitting in a country court where there were two rather junior barristers one prosecuting and the other defending an assault case. He told me that the prosecutor had obviously learnt that a good barrister always settles a witness down with a few straight forward questions to make him or her feel at home in the witness box, so when he called his first witness - a grandmotherly, elderly woman - he approached her and asked, "Mrs. Taylor, do you know me?" She responded, "Why, yes, I do know you Mr. Williams. I've known you since you were a young boy. And frankly, you've been a big disappointment to me. You lie, you cheat on your wife, and you manipulate people and talk about them behind their backs. You think you're a hot shot prosecutor when you haven't the brains to realise you will never amount to anything more than a two-bit paper pusher. Yes, I know you." The lawyer was stunned. At a complete loss and not knowing what else to do, he pointed across the room and asked, "Mrs. Taylor, do you know counsel for the defence?" She again replied, "Why, yes I do. I've known Mr. Bradley since he was a youngster, too. I used to baby-sit him for his parents. And he,

too, has been a real disappointment to me. He's lazy, bigoted, and he has a drinking problem. The man can't build a normal relationship with anyone and his law practice is one of the shoddiest in the entire state. Yes, I know him." At this point, my colleague, the judge told me he felt he should intervene and so he leant forward and said – softly but very clearly - "If either of you asks her if she knows me, you'll be jailed for contempt of court!"

The theme of this conference is "Water" and one cannot help but admire the work that Rotary International does around the world to improve the supply of clean water to many communities, in particular to villages throughout Africa, Asia and Latin America where, for many, getting clean water is a daily struggle. However, with respect to this laudable endeavour, the Principal of the Friends' School in Hobart, Mr Nelson File, has a cautionary tale. Nelson File is a Quaker and when he was living in America he went on a Quaker expedition to Nepal. The target was a very poor village which had no water supply to hand. Each day, the women of the village had to walk, I think he said, 40 minutes, to the nearest stream to collect water in a bucket or like container and then walk 40 minutes back again. Needless to say, the standard of hygiene in this village was very poor and, consequently, the infant mortality rate was very high. Nelson File and his team built a pipe from the stream to the village and installed pumps, thus bringing a constant supply of clean fresh water right into the village. As a result of that, and a little education, the immediate consequence was an improvement in the standard

of hygiene and a drop in the infant mortality rate. A win/win you might say, but Nelson File says what he and his team did not foresee, as a direct consequence of their good work, was that the village did not have resources to feed all the children that hitherto had perished, and malnutrition became the village problem instead of a clean water supply. Hence, it is a cautionary tale – look carefully at all the possible consequences before going to the aid of someone or some community.

From the themes selected for each session at this conference, including “Every Drop Counts;” “60% of the human body is water;” and “The lifeblood of our community”, it is clear that Rotarians understand that a continual supply of water is critical for the survival of the human race. But it goes deeper than that. According to a series of lectures that are delivered online by Open Universities Australia’s Open2Study programme from the Institute of Antarctic and Marine Studies here in Hobart, water is the very source of life. It is one of a number of compelling programmes delivered free online to everyone who wants to be a learner. The Marine and Antarctic Science segment of this fabulous online Open2Study programme makes a case for water not only being critical for the survival for the human race, but that it was the beginning of life on planet earth. By the use of a DVD and accompanying transcript, the programme explains that in 1953 a scientist designed a flask system with gases found in the ancient atmosphere, and a spark plug to simulate lighting and radiation and an ocean. This collection accumulated amino acids which apparently are the fundamental building blocks of proteins. Subsequent

experiments showed that amino acids could be aggregated into proteins. In 1993, there was a breakthrough experiment that demonstrated that in these primitive experimental atmospheres it was possible to generate the RNA, or ribose nucleic acid molecule which is one of the molecules of life and, importantly, is a self-replicating molecule. Now, this evening is not the time to develop this concept in full, but over the course of a few minutes in his on-line DVD, Professor Johnson traces the development of RNA molecules into primitive cells that absorbed the carbon in the atmosphere and converted it into organic molecules. He said that this was the beginning of life and he tells everyone who is watching and listening to him that all this happened about  $3^{1/2}$  million years ago.

I was spell-bound and totally captivated by the facts that the substance we rather take for granted, the chemical compound made up of two hydrogen atoms and 1 oxygen atom ( $H_2O$ ) may well have been the very source of life, and that today, that life remains dependent for its continuance on that chemical compound we call water. I was equally captivated and spellbound by the facts that mankind is now so clever that it is able to delve back more than 3 million years and make these discoveries, and further that a scientist can deliver these discoveries in words and pictures simultaneously to millions of people all over the world with the use of technology that has been developed by mankind in a relatively very short period of time.

It is astonishing and bewildering. It is exciting yet humbling, and, perhaps as the current young generation would say, it is totally awesome.

In a different way, all those words apply to the work that is done by Rotary in the service of others, especially in those places where this commodity that is both the source of, and the staff of, life is hard to come by. I am sure that you will all find this conference – directed as one theme has it to water – “The essence of our being” – interesting, stimulating, and even perhaps totally awesome.

Accordingly, I declare the 2014 Rotary District 9830 conference open.