TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS

SUPREME COURT OF THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

CEREMONIAL SITTING

ON THE OCCASION OF THE APPOINTMENT

OF

CHIEF JUSTICE HELEN GAY MURRELL

CANBERRA

9.34 AM, MONDAY, 28 OCTOBER 2013

THE REGISTRAR: This is a ceremonial sitting for the swearing in of the Honourable Chief Justice Helen Murrell.

REFSHAUGE ACJ: I welcome you all to this important ceremonial sitting for the swearing in of the Honourable Chief Justice Helen Murrell, as the fourth Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of the Australian Capital Territory. I particularly welcome the distinguished judicial officers from many of the courts around Australia including French CJ and Gaigler J of the High Court of Australia, Beasley ACJ of the Supreme Court of New South Wales, Faulks DCJ and Finn J of the Family Court of Australia, Federal Circuit Court Brewster and Neville JJ, and former New South Wales Walmsley J.

I welcome our additional and acting judges as well as the former Chief Justices Miles and Higgins and former Justice Gallop.

I acknowledge the Ngunnawal people, the traditional custodians of the land on which this ceremony is being held and pay my respects to their elders past and present. I thank them for the continuing contribution they make to our culture.

It is my pleasure now to invite Ms Violet Sheridan to welcome us to country.

MS SHERIDAN: Thank you. I suppose I had better tell the truth because I am sitting in the witness box I have been told.

Before I start I always like to tell a little bit about my story and what makes me a Ngunnawal woman, because my father is actually a Wiradjuri man from Tumut Bungle so I have always been told that I follow my mother's bloodline. My mother is a Ngunnawal woman from the Yass area. Some of our family have lived for a long time in Queanbeyan, Yass, around Rye Creek – my grandmother is actually buried out at Rye Creek, they used to call her Queen Caroline Chisholm Lane. That is my great great grandmother. There is a little mud hut that still stands out there where she brought up nine children. I am actually a mother of four and a grandmother of 18. I love them to death sometimes I feel a little bit guilty about loving my grandchildren more than me kids but I can hand them back.

But I would like to tell you a little bit about what my thoughts are about welcome to country. A welcome to country for me, a welcome to country ceremony is a traditional Aboriginal blessing symbolising the traditional owners consent to an event taking place on their land. It also shows respect for the first peoples of the land.

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So that is a little bit about my feelings of what I think what welcome to country is and I am always grateful that someone at an event like this has invited someone from the Ngunnawal people along to do a welcome on behalf of my people.

I feel honoured to be here today to do the welcome to country on this special occasion. The appointment of Helen Murrell CJ to the ACT Supreme Court is a significant milestone for the ACT. I understand she is well-regarded in the legal community with a long list of personal achievements. I am a little bit nervous too.

I look forward to Murrell CJ continuing to apply her wealth of knowledge and understanding to the ACT justice system and extend a warm welcome to her and her family to the land of the Ngunnawal people.

I acknowledge Chief Minister, Katy Gallagher, ACT Attorney General, Simon Corbell, French CJ of the High Court, other chief magistrates and justices, President of the ACT Bar Association, Greg Stretton, President of the ACT Law Society, Martin Hockridge, Director General of Justice and Community Safety, Kathy Leigh, special guests, ladies and gentlemen.

In keeping with the general spirit of friendship and reconciliation it gives me great pleasure to welcome you all here today on behalf of my people and my mother's people, the Ngunnawal people.

God bless, and thank you very much.

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MURRELL J: Acting Chief Justice, I have the Honour to announce that I have been appointed Chief Justice of this court and I present my commission.

REFSHAUGE ACJ: Thank you, Murrell J. Please sit while the commission is read.

Mr Acting Registrar, please read the commission.

THE REGISTRAR: Supreme Court Act, 1933, Appointment of Chief Justice, Commission. The Australian Capital Territory Executive under section 4 of the Supreme Court Act 1933 appoints Helen Gay Murrell to be the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court from 28 October 2013. Dated 12 day of September 2013. Signed by Attorney General, Mr Simon Corbell, and the Chief Minister, Ms Katy Gallagher.

45 REFSHAUGE ACJ: Mr Acting Registrar, please hand me the affirmation

of office. Murrell J I invite you to take the affirmation of office under the Australian Capital Territory Supreme Court Act 1933.

- MURRELL J: I Helen Gay Murrell do solemnly and sincerely affirm that I will well and truly serve in the office of Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of the Australian Capital Territory and that I will do right to all manner of people according to law without fear or favour, affection or ill will.
- 10 REFSHAUGE ACJ: I invite you to subscribe the affirmation and I will witness it.

I direct the Registrar to take this document and enter it in the records of the court.

- Chief Justice, I welcome you warmly on behalf of the members of the Supreme Court of the ACT. Your colleagues assure you of their support and goodwill.
- I also have the Honour to pass to you the jabot of former Chief Justice Miles handed on to your predecessor, former Chief Justice Higgins who at the ceremonial sitting to farewell him from this bench gave it in to the safe keeping of the Registrar to be handed on to you as a tradition though it may not be likely that it will be further worn.
 - MURRELL CJ: Thank you Refshauge J. I shall cherish this garment.

Mr Attorney?

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- MR CORBELL: May it please the court. Your Honours, it is a privilege to be here today for this ceremonial sitting to acknowledge and welcome your Honour, Helen Murrell CJ, to the court.
- I would like to thank Auntie Violet Sheridan for her welcome to country on behalf of the Ngunnawal people.
 - I would also like to acknowledge Justices of the High Court present today, French CJ, Gageler J, Justices and Master of the ACT Supreme Court, Magistrates, Judges of the Federal Circuit Court and Family Court of Australia, your colleagues and peers, and past and present leaders of the legal profession here in Canberra. I would particularly like to note the presence of former Chief Justices Terry Higgins and Jeffrey Miles who join us today and, of course, to our Chief Minister, Ms Katy Gallagher.
- I am also pleased to welcome your parents, Ken and Helen Murrell, your

partner, Paul, your daughters and your brother and sister, who are all here today to join with us on this special occasion.

Your Honour's curriculum vitae is, to say the least, formidable. With over 30 years of extensive experience in the legal profession I have no doubt that your Honour will provide strong leadership in this court.

After receiving your high school education at Sydney Church of England Girls Grammar School, Redlands, your Honour completed a Bachelor of Arts, Bachelor of Laws degree at the University of New South Wales in 1977. You also undertook a Diploma of Criminology from the University of Sydney in 1981 which no doubt stood you in good stead later in your career when you were presiding over criminal cases in the New South Wales District Court.

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Your Honour was enrolled as a solicitor of the Supreme Court of New South Wales in 1977 and your first job was as a solicitor with the then Commonwealth Crown Solicitor's Office and the New South Wales Legal Aid Commission. You have later noted that in this position you were delivering legal services at the coal face and that although the work was exhausting you were sometimes able to change individual lives for the better.

Your Honour was called to the bar in 1981 and you practised as a barrister until 1996. In 1995 you were appointed Senior Counsel. Your practice included criminal law, administrative law, environmental law, common law in equity and many of your briefs were for the government. As was noted by the former New South Wales Attorney Mr Shaw, you displayed energy and versatility in your role as a barrister by conducting both prosecution and defence cases.

Between 1994 and 1996 you were also environment counsel for the New South Wales Environment Protection Authority Board, which reflected your reported personal devotion to environmental issues. In 1996 your Honour was appointed as a judge of the New South Wales District Court and you spent the next 17 years presiding over a long list of civil and criminal matters.

During this time you were also involved in an impressive range of other legal activities and the number I would like to highlight include as an acting judge with the Land and Environment Court in New South Wales, president of the New South Wales Equal Opportunity Tribunal, a deputy president of the Administrative Decisions Tribunal of New South Wales, head of its equal opportunity division, deputy chair person of the New South Wales Medical Tribunal, chair of the New South Wales Judicial

Commission Sexual Assault Bench Book Committee and a visiting fellow right here in Canberra at the Australian National University College of Law.

You have continued to hold various roles in the National Judicial College of Australia, of which you continue to be a member, including regional convenor for New South Wales and a judicial associate. Notably, you also helped establish the first drug court in New South Wales and were a senior judge of that court between 1998 and 2003. In this capacity you were a member of the United Nations working group on drug courts in Vienna in 1999. You have also been a member of various professional bodies, including the New South Wales chapter of the Australian Association of Forensic Sciences, the International and Australia Association of Women Judges and the Women for Influence Steering Committee for Action Aid Australia.

In addition, you have presented and facilitated various education programs and conferences, including the International Association of Women Judges Regional Conference in Auckland this year, the National Judicial College of Australia witness assessment program and the International Organisation of Judicial Trainers Fifth Biennial Conference in France. Your Honour's profound involvement in the legal world has also extended to concerns about judicial appointment processes and women on the bench.

In a speech you gave in 2005 at a seminar held by New South Wales Young Lawyers and the Women's Lawyers Association of New South Wales you argued for more transparent appointments to the bench in New South Wales and for a more representative bench to boost public confidence in the judiciary. I am confident that the manner of your appointment to this office has mirrored your commitment, in relation to transparency.

In 2005 your advice to the then Commonwealth Attorney-General, the Honourable Philip Ruddock, was to, "embrace his female side". I note that there has been some media attention about your Honour being the first woman Chief Justice of this court. I believe that the current make up of our courts demonstrates the diversity which is second nature to our city and our Territory.

I would note that your Honour's appointment comes at a time when the court is benefiting from recent improvements in the administration of justice. In particular, following a joint review of case management between Penfold J and the director-general of the Justice and Community Safety Directorate the court and the government has worked to implement

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a series of measures to improve Supreme Court procedures. We have seen significant success in improving case management. A 45 percent reduction in the number of criminal matters older than 12 months awaiting finalisation at the end of this year, compared to the previous 12-year period.

The government remains committed to improving access to justice and in particular to ensuring that the Territory's court system serves the community's needs. The assistance and support provided by the government and my directorate will continue to this court to make substantial progress in reducing the number of long wait cases, as well as delayed reserved judgments. I look forward to working with you and all members of this court to continue to improve access to justice for our community.

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Your Honours, I would conclude on a more personal note. In 2005 in the speech I mentioned earlier you stated that "a good judge has qualities such as courtesy, patience, open-mindedness and awareness of contemporary social issues."

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This sentiment was echoed in a 2010 Sydney Morning Herald article in which you stated that:

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"Judges of the district and local courts are family people with community involvement and are too involved in the nitty gritty of all aspects of various people's lives to be out of touch."

I have been informed by your past two District Court associates that your Honour has these qualities in spades. They described you as absolutely positive in every aspect of your life and noted that you approach anything you set your mind to with a practical and optimistic commitment. Your associates commented that even after the most hectic of days you maintain a vibrancy that is contagious and a smile that has caused at least one offender to shout from the dock, "You have a beautiful smile, your Honour." This vibrancy is accompanied by an acute memory, a genuinely uncluttered and open mind and a discrete and disciplined nature.

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You have been quoted in the Sydney media as valuing your work/life balance and still finding times for your passions that include surfing, ocean swimming, travel, the arts and yoga. Although you are now located a little bit further from the ocean I am confident that your Honour will continue to enjoy these personal pursuits in the greater capital region. When your Honour was sworn in as a judge of the New South Wales District Court you remarked that during your tertiary education you were taught to love the law, both for what it was and for what it could achieve

as a social instrument.

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I am confident that the ACT community has gained a great asset with your appointment. I am confident that your Honour will serve our community well and on behalf of the government I wish you all the best in your new position. May it please the court.

MURRELL CJ: Thank you, Mr Attorney. Mr Stretton.

- MR STRETTON: Chief Justice, your Honours on the bench, to those that made it to the witness box and those that didn't, thank you very much for the opportunity to address this court today.
- Your Honour as we have heard was appointed senior counsel in New South Wales in 1995. In that year there were 16 appointments. Your Honour was the only woman. Amongst those appointed include such names as Cliff Hoeben, Ian Harrison, Meagher AJ, who will be well-known to your Honour. There were only eight women before your Honour appointed as senior counsel in New South Wales, the first of whom was Mary Gaudron, a former Justice of our High Court.
 - Of the eight who preceded you, two have remained at the Bar and the remainder have all been appointed judges, including her Honour Beazley, who is with us today and was only a couple of days ago made a life member of the New South Wales Bar Association. But your Honour has trumped that list of names by becoming the first Chief Justice, a distinction which sits very well with your Honour's career.
- Your Honour has a special interest in justice for indigenous Australians, as well as the underprivileged, an interest no doubt fostered by your time at Legal Aid and your Honour has observed of the injustice that can occur in courts where people do not understand enough about indigenous people. For example, your Honour chided judicial colleagues not knowing that it is offensive for an aboriginal person on some occasions to look the person to whom they are speaking, such as a judge, in the eye and yet judges have found against such people on that very basis. That was a matter that your Honour addressed to your judicial colleague, and I am sure that indigenous people are thankful for it.
- 40 Your Honour, it has been mentioned that your Honour was involved in the Drug Court and spent some years there. It was a court set up in response to breaking the cycle of drug dependency, the associated commission of crime to finance that dependency, of consequent imprisonment, the continuation of drug dependency within prison and upon release from prison. It was a court in which your Honour had a very different role to the

role your Honour had as a judge of the District Court. It was a court in which your Honour presided for a number of years and with great resilience because that particular task in that particular court is one that places great strains on the judge who is appointed in charge and there are many people, we understand, whose lives have been turned around by their experience in that court.

Your Honour has made comment, as the Attorney noted, in relation to transparency and diversity in judicial appointments. Your Honour made a speech some years ago suggesting that the Law Council's protocol for the transparency in the appointment of judges should be adopted. Regrettably, that still has not happened to this day. But your Honour observed that a lot of judicial officers will come from the ranks of senior barristers, many of whom, your Honour observed, lacked the personal qualities required of a good judge. Your Honour said that practice at the Bar may broaden the perspective of some barristers but others remain intellectually-arrogant, needlessly-competitive products of a narrow upbringing. Your Honour went on to say that we cannot expect such a person will readily transmogrify into an intellectually modest, endlessly courteous and compassionate judge with the patience to hear from a slightly-mad self-represented litigant, if necessary for weeks on end, and then dispassionately deliver the right decision. Well, your Honour will find no shortage of slightly-mad self-represented litigants in this iurisdiction.

Your Honour has been concerned about the representation of women in judicial appointments or, more correctly, the lack of it. Recently, there was a function in Melbourne when Sharon Cook, the managing partner of Henry Davis York, was awarded the award, which is known as the "Lasting Legacy Award", and it was presented in Melbourne and Ms Cook had this to say:

"I hope that in a few years' time, no matter how much fun we have had tonight and how inspiring the night has been, that we won't need a night like tonight. We absolutely need tonight now but I hope there will come a time when female success becomes the norm. It will not be something that will be singled out."

And it was interesting to note that it was Fiona McLeod of senior counsel who presented the award and Ms McLeod is in charge of the Law Council's national attrition and reengagement study in relation to keeping women within the profession.

Now, your Honour comes to this court with a wealth of experience and a track record of judicial quality and, I am reliably informed, also a steely

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determination to ensure that the ACT Supreme Court is an efficient and well-respected court with a name for judicial excellence. We applaud that determination.

As the Attorney has indicated, "Who's Who" has listed your interests as surfing, swimming, travel and the arts. Well, welcome, your Honour, to the home of the National Gallery, the National Portrait Gallery, the National Museum, the National Library and, of course, the Skywhale If your Honour is considering indulging in swimming during the winter months, as many Canberrans do, your Honour will no doubt become familiar with what is known as the "doobie dome" which is a pool not far from where your Honour's Chambers will be and, of course, although people say you won't be able to indulge your surfing habits; that is not so because, as we all know, Jervis Bay is part of the ACT, and so perhaps the court may convene there.

Now, your Honour, we welcome you as a judge but also as a new Canberra resident although it may be some little time before Brumbies and names like Lealiifano and Mogg and Raiders and names like Papalii and Campese become breakfast conversations in your household.

Your Honour, on behalf of the Bar, we warmly welcome you as Chief Justice.

25 HER HONOUR: Thank you very much, Mr Stretton. Mr Hockridge?

MR HOCKRIDGE: Thank you, your Honour, and distinguished guests. I too note that we meet this morning on the ancestral lands of the Ngunnawal people and acknowledge their strong and enduring cultural heritage. I pay my respects to their elders past and present and I also thank Auntie Violet for her welcome to country.

The legal profession is very pleased to welcome you as Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of the Australian Capital Territory and it is pleasing to see that two people who previously held that position are also in court today. So a very large percentage of the judges who have held that position are here so you are indeed in elite company.

Before I continue, I should really say that my predecessors in this position warned me that speaking third is often difficult because you need to get your pen out and strike out really quite a lot of what you might otherwise have had to say and certainly the Attorney-General has done a very good job of listing your biography and Mr Stretton has made people laugh as he usually does.

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We have come a long way since Lionel Oscar Lukin J was appointed the first judge of the Supreme Court on 25 January 1934. As has been indicated, you are indeed our first female Chief Justice and women constitute half the number of judges on this honourable court. The ACT is a progressive jurisdiction in many ways. We certainly like to think that we are. And it is not unknown that in recent days, the ACT Legislative Assembly has passed same sex marriage legislation. Of course, unlike the reaction to that legislation, your appointment has been universally applauded.

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The legal profession is pleased that you are a strong advocate of therapeutic jurisprudence. As has been mentioned, your Honour was the first judge of the New South Wales Drug Court, a problem-solving court focusing on rehabilitation of offenders and long-term behavioural change. You will, I am sure, find that the ACT is a jurisdiction that meets the criteria that you outlined when you wrote:

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"Jurisdictions that prioritise the purposes of rehabilitation and reduction of recidivism provide a framework within which therapeutic jurisprudence can be applied to enhance the prospects of offender rehabilitation."

You also noted that therapeutic jurisprudence can be applied in the civil as well as the criminal arena.

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My inquiries have revealed that you are both very well respected and also very well liked. Raised in Sydney, that bastion of social comment, "The Manly Daily", proclaimed bold headlines, "Peninsula woman to be Chief Justice in the ACT Supreme Court," and proudly confirmed that you are a born and bred northern beaches woman. In perhaps a more erudite cross town publication, "The Sydney Morning Herald", you achieved some notoriety as one of a number of judges who provided insight into what judges do in an article entitled, "The secret lives of judges." You were reported as saying that: "Judges are family people with community involvement ..." You might have already heard this, Tony stole my thunder:

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"... and too embroiled in the nitty-gritty of all aspects of various people's lives to be out of touch. We are not prone to outbursts of tears but that does not mean that we won't deeply consider the cases before us and possibly agonise over the results."

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We trust that your new role will not reduce you to tears and you will bring to the people of Canberra and the other people who come before this court the same careful consideration for which you are renowned.

You assume the role of Chief Justice at a time when there has been and will continue to be debate regarding the number of judges for this court. Another significant issue is the adequacy of this Supreme Court building.

The court has been located here since May 1963, but it is the case that the process has begun to improve your digs. Listing and procedural form will also be something that you will no doubt consider.

Again, as has been indicated here this morning, we have heard of your interest in yoga, surfing and swimming. We do also welcome your family your partner, Paul, well-known to many practitioners in this jurisdiction as a forensic expert and who has given evidence in this very courtroom.

Also present are your daughters Eleanor, who is a legal graduate who is now in Katherine and who was flown here from Darwin and Meredith, who has travelled all the way from Hong Kong. Your stepdaughter, Melissa, who is a Queenslander has attended here today, as has your parents, sister and brother. All in all your family have made a not-insignificant contribution to the airline industry. Balancing the ledger somewhat is Meredith's fiancé's parents who are Canberra locals and as we have heard you have some fairly significant ties to the Canberra community yourself.

The profession congratulates you on your appointment, welcomes you to the ACT or perhaps more correctly welcomes you back to the ACT and looks forward to appearing before you, and continuing the productive collaborative relationship out of the courtroom that we have shared with your predecessors and with the other judges of this court.

30 May it please the court.

MURRELL J: Thank you, Mr Hockridge.

Auntie Violet, thank you for welcoming me to this country. I acknowledge the Ngunawal people as the traditional custodians of this land and I pay my respects to all their elders, past and present.

Your Honours, Chief Minister, Attorney, distinguished guests, members of the legal profession, friends and colleagues thank you for the respect that you show the court by your attendance today. Thank you Mr Attorney again, Mr Stretton and Mr Hockridge for your generous remarks.

Many people have contributed to my personal and professional life. Some are present and your presence means a lot to me. In particular, I wish to

thank the women who came before me in the law, the women who have accompanied me on my journey, some of whom are here and some of whom are on the bench and the women of the next generation who contribute diversity and change to the law and to broader society. Foremost among the women whom I must thank are my daughters, Meredith and Eleanor. As we have heard they have travelled a long way to be here. I also thank Paul for his past support and for moving here to support me in my new role. More than a decade ago he reluctantly moved from Canberra to Sydney. It took years for him to adjust to that sea change, but now it is back to the bush.

I am very pleased that my parents, my brother and sister, other family and family to be members and close friends are present. I am honoured to be joining this court as part of a small team, but one that has a combined richness and breadth of legal experience. This court has a proud history. My colleagues and I are committed to ensuring the continuing strength The court's recent difficulties are and independence of this bench. well-known. under the stewardship of my predecessor. Honourable Terence Higgins, the court made significant progress in addressing those problems.

Our priority is to build on that progress to streamline processes and to cut delays. I know that the profession shares that goal and I am confident that the combined energy and goodwill of the court and the profession will yield positive results in a relatively short time. I am delighted to be moving to the ACT. Today Canberra has a vibrant and progressive personality. The ACT offers a great lifestyle. I am pleased to be closer to colleagues at the National Judicial College of Australia and the Australian National University. But the move does have its downside. Even my love of vintage has been challenged by the perfect sixties vintage environment in which the court conducts its business.

The Canberra to which I return late in my career is a very different place from which I arrived in 1977, at the beginning of my legal career. I was a bushytailed graduate lawyer with the then Commonwealth Crown Solicitor's office and I came here to undertake the legal workshop at ANU. When my parents delivered me to the Gowrie Hostel in Northbourne Avenue it was a scorching day and there was an overwhelming reception from the fly population. The human population was not evident. It was a weekend, the town was deserted and there was little prospect of acquiring nourishment. The accommodation was dismal to say the least. It was an unpromising introduction to the nation's capital. However, the situation did improve. An early highlight was meeting a well-known Canberra brain at the legal workshop, now my colleague, Penfold J.

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It was almost by accident that I fell into the law. I did not come from a legal family, although the position has changed. My brother and my younger daughter, Eleanor, are lawyers so we are now a legal family. Like many who entered the law in the 1970s I was motivated by a desire to make a difference, particularly to the disadvantaged. I saw the law as a vehicle for achieving equality and social justice.

I was lucky to be educated at the then new and innovative University of New South Wales Law School. After a brief stint at the Commonwealth Crown Solicitor's Office I worked at the Legal Aid Commission of New South Wales. It was the heyday of that organisation and one of the happiest periods of my working life. Friendships from those days hold firm after 30 years. I spent 15 wonderful, but arduous years at the Sydney Bar. I still miss trial advocacy and occasionally I have to restrain myself from cross-examining a witness. But from day one on the District Court bench I knew that I had made the right move.

For me judging is the most rewarding way to practice the law. I have always felt at ease on the bench. Today may be a possible exception. I can honestly say that every single day that I sat on the District Court brought its rewards. The District Court bench comprises a fine group of talented commonsense and hardworking judges. I will miss their friendship and support.

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The Drug Court was a unique judicial experience. It is quite unusual for a judge to be a leader of a multi-disciplinary team, dealing with stakeholders and I had a continuing involvement with offenders who came before the court; a mixed blessing. I learned a lot about addiction, mental illness and human behaviour generally. I embrace the opportunity to lead this court. I thank my brother and sister judges on this bench for their warm welcome. I look forward to working closely with them to provide the best possible quality of justice to the ACT community. To be a judicial officer on any court to participate in the third arm of government is a huge and humbling responsibility. From time to time judicial officers should reflect on their role. This appointment has caused me to do that. I am privileged to renew the undertaking that I gave 17 years ago to do right to all manner of people, according to the law without fear or favour, affection or ill will. I will do my very best to fulfil that undertaking.

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The court will adjourn.

ADJOURNED

[10.14 am]