

'Freedom isn't Free'

Australia Day address for Spring Bay Lions Club, 26th January 2010

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Hello everybody – *G'day!*

A lot of words will be said about our country and about us today – but few of them will say as much about us as the greeting *G'day*.

Let's try it out – I wonder what difference it would make if every Australian stopped what they were doing and said *G'day* to a stranger on Australia day – just once each year. Say *G'day* to me, go on. Now once more so I can really hear you. Now turn to the nearest stranger and say *G'day* to them.

As a child my mum and dad took us to a church where that happened every Sunday. It felt a bit weird but somehow good to be offered recognition, inclusion and friendship by strangers.

Now add a handshake and eye engagement and you have it all. *"Welcome, I am unarmed, and you can trust me"*.

In our country we have great 'bullshit detectors' if you will pardon the term. *G'day* and a handshake are a pretty good qualifier for any potential friendship. But there are hazards even in simplicity and one of them involves the importance of a good memory when meeting strangers.

I most admire people of generous spirit who can cross the political divide. Men like Sir James Killen, Federal member for the Brisbane seat of Morton and his great friendship with Fred Daly from the Labor side of politics. If I have a role model for my political journey – it is Sir James.

One of Sir James's stories about Fred involved (having) a good memory. Fred was meeting a large group and as he worked his way around the room with the usual pleasantries, *"great to see you again, how's the family, thanks for your continued support etc"* – he came upon a fellow he recognised and said *"Ah, very nice to catch up, how's the old man?"*

"Very sorry to tell you, Fred, but he's passed on" came the reply. *"Terrible loss, made a great contribution, sadly missed"* said Fred.

As he worked his way around the room eventually he came upon the same fellow, *"How's the old man?"* asked Fred. *"Still dead"* came the poker-faced reply.

Fred, on the other hand, tells the story of Sir James travelling in Western Queensland, where in a small town he stopped to congratulate an old lady on the magnificence of her garden. *"Magnificent garden, madam, that you and the Lord have here together"* he beamed. *"Oh, is that right Sir James"* she shot back *"Well, you should have seen it when he had it on his own!"*.

On Saturday last I met a bloke called Jack in St Helens. I asked him if he would sign my petition for the dredging of the St Helens Barway. We shook hands, he squinted at the smallish writing and where to write his details.

"Here Jack", I said after he told me he was 85. "Name, signature, address, wife's name, colour of eyes, name, rank and serial number" as is often said in our country in jest.

I'll bet everyone of you can think of an example of what happened next. His eyes filled with tears and he said, "It's 24 weeks today Jim since she died."

I waited in silence until he finished his writing before I put my hand on his arm and apologised. And yet even in my discomfort and regret we were joined in that moment by another great Aussie icon - mateship.

That moment was about the open, wholesome and decent humanity which characterises our nation - so it's worth a few moments of our time this Australia Day 2010 to think about where we came from and how we might protect these qualities we celebrate here, and which qualities are so admired by others for whom life, in their lands, is not so good.

Everywhere I look today I see an Australian flag. I think the more we debate its replacement, the more powerful it becomes as a national symbol.

For me, this symbol of nationhood and of those who have defended our democratic rights is the Australian flag. This is a flag not just for British descendants - but for the tapestry of mankind of every race creed and colour which is the vibrant, tolerant, modern-day Australia.

For me the Australian flag means one word. **Freedom.**

The unhappy face of people-smuggling exists because we have what their customers want. Freedom and a better way of life for their families. Freedom to be heard and to follow our religious views. Freedom to walk our streets in safety, freedom to criticise our leaders without fear of persecution, freedom to fail and permission to succeed.

The traditional owners of this land comprised 9 tribes from St Patricks Head at St Helens to the Tasman peninsula. These people migrated freely within the costal district and inland regions depending upon the season and food sources. The Oyster Bay tribe were among the largest of these groups at an estimated 700-800 people and we also pay tribute to their traditions and heritage on Australia Day 2010. So 'Welcome to Country' and their part in forging the history of our unique nation.

A simple quote I like is "*the world is run by the people who show up*".

So, while January 26th each year is all about Captain James, on November 24th, 1642 Abel Janszoon Tasman showed up off the Tasmanian coast just north of Macquarie Harbour. After skirting the coast and being blown out to sea in a bay he named 'Storm Bay', a ship's carpenter eventually swam ashore at Blackman's Bay, not far from here, and planted the Dutch flag on December 3rd. Visscher Island, off the Dunalley narrows, was named after his navigator and Maria Island after the wife of the Governor of the east India Company - Tasman's employer in Batavia.

Then, in 1802, the largest scientific expedition ever to leave Europe reached Tasmania. French explorer Nicholas Baudin arrived with zoologists, artists, astronomers, geographers, mineralogists, gardeners and a pharmacist.

Today, our coast bears testament to the fearless discovery of the unknown by these people. Among many land forms - Capes Peron, De Tombeaux, Tourville and the Freycinet Peninsula - are just some of our magnificent coastlines named by these men. And when their ship's surgeon, Rene Mauge, passed away at 11pm on February 20th, 1802 and was laid to rest on the southern entrance to Chinaman's Bay, the point bears his name and stands lonely vigil for his soul, far from family and friends.

How fitting that today we should have a Mayor of French descent, eager to remind us of this most significant chapter in the evolution of this part of Tasmania for those of us fortunate enough to live here.

More recently, the history of the Spring Bay region has been forged by family names like Castle, Higgs, Haig, Pike, Parker, Wilson, Sparks, Oakley, Salmon, Drake, Jones, Chesterman, McDougal, Swan, Cruse and Gray as just some of the farmers, saw millers and boat builders of the area. And there are many more I have not named to whom we should say 'thank you' today for their personal contributions, their dreams, their life's work building a community, creating work for others and leaving a fine example for others to carry on.

So - how might we bring these piece parts of our story together? I think the motto of Lions International says it all. *'We serve'*.

There are plenty of great Australians to celebrate this day - our regional communities are the sum of all the piece parts which make us tick. So, on Australia Day 2010 let's not just remember indigenous peoples, explorers, soldiers, sailors and airmen - but also the volunteers, fireys, ambos, meals-on-wheels and cancer support groups, service clubs, nurses and carers who also work to defend personal freedoms of independence, dignity and self-respect for every age group and for people living with disabilities.

You see ladies and gentlemen - the truth is, freedom isn't free.

I conclude that every one of us can contribute by showing up to do something for community. Whatever your choice of participation may be - write a letter to the paper, have an opinion, oppose bad policy, lend a helping hand to those less fortunate but please join in to help shoulder the load.

And support those with the capacity to speak out and help ensure the principals of mateship, trust and a fair go remain the unquenchable stars by which we guide our great ship of Australia into the future.

I wish you all a very happy Australia day 2010 and once again thank the Spring Bay Lions for the honour of delivering this address today.

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