

SUPREME COURT OF THE NORTHERN TERRITORY  
STATE SQUARE, DARWIN

CEREMONIAL SITTING TO WELCOME THE HONOURABLE  
JUSTICE MEREDITH DAY HUNTINGFORD UPON PRESENTATION OF HER  
COMMISSION AS A JUDGE OF THE SUPREME COURT OF THE NORTHERN  
TERRITORY

TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS

COURTROOM 1, FRIDAY 16 AUGUST 2024 AT 9AM

**PRESIDING JUDGES:**

THE HON. CHIEF JUSTICE MICHAEL GRANT AO  
THE HON. JUSTICE JUDITH KELLY AO  
THE HON. JUSTICE JENNY BLOKLAND AO  
THE HON. JUSTICE SONIA BROWNHILL (ALICE SPRINGS)  
THE HON. JUSTICE MEREDITH DAY HUNTINGFORD  
THE HON. JUSTICE JOHN BURNS  
THE HON. JUSTICE PETER BARR  
THE HON. ACTING JUSTICE TREVOR RILEY AO

**IN ATTENDANCE:**

THE HON DEAN MILDREN AM RFD KC

SHERIFF'S OFFICER: Silence all stand and please remain standing.

All persons having any business before this Honourable Supreme Court of the Northern Territory, now draw nigh and give your attendance and you shall be heard. God save the King.

Please be seated.

ASSOCIATE: A Ceremonial Sitting to welcome the Honourable Justice Meredith Day Huntingford upon presentation of her Commission as a Judge of the Supreme Court of the Northern Territory

GRANT CJ: Justice Day Huntingford, do you present your commission?

HUNTINGFORD J: Chief Justice, I have the honour to announce that I have received a Commission from His Honour the Administrator appointing me as a Judge of the Supreme Court of the Northern Territory. I now present my Commission.

GRANT CJ: Madam Registrar, would you please read the Commission.

REGISTRAR BLANCH: Commission to the Honourable Meredith Clare Day Huntingford, know ye that, reposing full trust and confidence in your loyalty, learning, integrity and ability, I, Hugh Crosby Heggie, Officer of the Order of Australia, recipient of the Public Service Medal, Administrator of the Northern Territory of Australia, acting with the advice of the Executive Council, under section 32(1) of the *Supreme Court Act*, do by this my Commission appoint you Meredith Clare Day Huntingford, to be a Judge of the Supreme Court of the Northern Territory of Australia from and including the 11th day of June in the year 2024, to have, hold, exercise and enjoy the said office under and subject to the provisions of the *Supreme Court Act 1979* as amended from time to time with all rights, powers, privileges, advantages and jurisdiction thereto belonging or appertaining.

GRANT CJ: The Court welcomes and acknowledges the presence here today of His Honour, the Administrator, Professor Hugh Heggie; the Honourable Sally Thomas, former Administrator and Judge of this Court; Mr Michael Murphy, Commissioner of Police; Ms Gemma Lake, Chief Executive Officer of the Department of the Attorney-General and Justice; Mr Peter Shoyer, Ombudsman and Information Commissioner; Mr Jeswynn Yogaratnam, Anti-Discrimination Commissioner; Mr Nikolai Christrup SC, Solicitor General for the Northern Territory; Ms Naomi Loudon, Acting Independent Commissioner Against Corruption; Mr Hamish Baddeley, Honorary Consul of Denmark; other distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen.

The Judges of this court congratulate you on your appointment, Justice Huntingford. You are a very welcome addition to this bench and we all wish you the very best in the role.

At a structural level, with your appointment female Judges now constitute the majority of the permanent Judges of this court. That is a mark of just how far our community has come in terms of gender equality, and removing the barriers to the progression of female practitioners within the legal profession.

At a personal level, much is about to be said by those who will address the court this morning about your qualities and achievements. As will be clear from those speeches, yours is a most deserving appointment.

You have a very broad and diverse experience in the law, which includes as a solicitor and partner in a law firm, as a legal academic at the Charles Darwin University, as a government solicitor with the Northern Territory Attorney-General's Department including an extended period acting as the Chief Executive Officer of that department, as a Judge of the Local Court, and most recently as an acting Associate Judge of this Court.

That very diverse experience and your broad skill set make you particularly equipped, and perhaps even uniquely equipped, for the duties of this position.

Your appointment is a reflection of your professional expertise, your intellectual ability, your sound judgement, your work ethic and your unfailingly good nature which you have demonstrated over almost 40 years in the Northern Territory legal profession.

Both the court and the community are very fortunate to have you in this role, and you will no doubt play a vital part in the administration of justice in the Northern Territory.

Yes, thank you, Mr Solicitor.

MR CHRISTRUP SC: I acknowledge the Larrakia people as the traditional owners of this land. I pay my respects to elders past and present.

I rise to deliver this address on behalf of the Attorney-General, the Honourable Chansey Paech MLA, who regrettably is away from Darwin. I have been asked to convey his apologies and to pass on the best wishes to you, Justice Huntingford.

It is on occasions like these that we all get to know a little more about our judges. It can at times be a struggle to extract information about the person about to be coronated. I had no such problem here. Your "friends", to use a euphemism, were the ones to *approach me* as soon as Your Honour's appointment became public. They all seemed surprisingly eager to ensure that I was armed with the necessary ammunition. The vast majority of the stuff is not fit for publication of course, but it did paint a vivid picture.

One nugget that was proffered to me concerns a certain engineering blueprint of the Titanic. Your Honour purchased it in London. It occupied the most prominent of

positions on the wall in your office at Old Admiralty House at a time when Your Honour was an integral part of the Executive team. Your staff were intrigued by its possible significance and what it was all really supposed to mean. Is this organisation headed for imminent disaster? Are we close to outright collapse? This blue print is a subject to which I shall return.

Your Honour grew up on a farm near Lameroo in South Australia about 200 kilometres east of Adelaide with two younger brothers, Andrew and Lindsey and baby sister, Bronwyn.

Farming is hard work with only marginal financial return but your parents were determined to send all four children to Pembroke Boarding School in Kensington Park in Adelaide.

You made lifelong friends at Pembroke, including a very young Cris Cureton with whom you shared many interests.

One such interest was wilful disobedience to the school bylaws and in particular what you and your friends saw as a mean-spirited prohibition on leaving the school grounds at night-time.

In a well-executed conspiracy, as a group and under the cover of darkness, you were often in the habit of leaving your rooms using the windows, scaling down the wall to the lawn below via the downpipe. A foolhardy means of escape perhaps but a most understandable one given the choice was between pizza in the city with your friends, and the slop served up by the school kitchen.

The other interest shared by you and Mr Cureton was evidently all things long gone.

At your matriculation, Mr Cureton topped the State in Modern History – a feat Your Honour matched in Ancient History.

As John Waters QC observed when moving your admission in this Court in 1987:

“Looking at her academic transcript, had there been an industry in history, she clearly would have pursued that career”.

Luckily for the Territory, Your Honour chose the law, well-armed with the Year 12 prize you won in debating.

Your Honour pursued a Bachelor of Arts and a Bachelor of Laws degrees at Adelaide University. You were known to work up to three to four jobs at the time, including the bar at the Adelaide Oval. I am told that you would often return from work stinking of beer.

Following the completion of the double degree, Your Honour's gaze fell on Darwin when you were offered articles of clerkship with the Department of Law. And so it was that you moved north in the late 1980's – soon striking up friendships with the likes of Michael Grant and Greg Macdonald.

It was during this time that you crossed paths with Steve Huntingford. Or rather, according to his version of events, you crossed his path, literally, at the old Hotel Darwin. And thus a lifelong love was ignited.

As a young couple, you enjoyed having dinners together at Jessie's, or what is now known as the Parap Tavern, where there was a special - a steak and a bottle of Jacob's Creek for \$10. All you needed was \$20 between you and you were set for the evening. Those were the days.

You married young and have three children; Kate, to whom you refer as 'Doctor Kate'; Tom who is currently studying his Master's degree in Milan and is unable to be here today; and Emma who is studying journalism.

Your mother also joins you today, as do other members of your family together with a host of friends and colleagues.

Your Honour joined Elston & Gilchrist in 1991 where Ian Morris was already a partner and it took only a couple of years before you joined Morrie in that partnership.

Over time, other practitioners at that firm included Greg Macdonald of Solicitor for the Northern Territory fame, as well as Peggy Cheong and Chris Osborne. Not being without a sense of humour, you and Morrie lent your surnames to the service company – albeit in mirror form. I personally treasured seeing Yadsirrom in print, because it would inevitably appear as the payor on a cheque for the payment of barrister's fees.

It is a well-known fact that Your Honour's intellect is of the highest order, a fact that has been demonstrated time and time again to your colleagues and peers during your almost 40 years of practising law in the Territory. Indeed, it is usually the first remark that is made when the subject of Meredith Day Huntingford is broached. A broad and deep knowledge of everything concerning the law. A colleague, or former colleague more accurately, and one who is not renowned for being generous in his description of the intellect of others, summed it up with "she is smart as".

The mid 2000's saw your Honour move from Hunt & Hunt to take up a position as an Executive Contract Officer at the Solicitor for the Northern Territory.

As had been the case with Hunt & Hunt, you quickly rose through the ranks - December 2007 to October 2008: temporary transfer to Department of Primary Industry; from October 2008: Director of the Legal Unit at Department of Health and Families; from 21 January 2013: Acting Director of Litigation; from October 2013: permanent Director of Litigation; from 28 January 2014: Acting Deputy Chief

Executive Officer of the Attorney-General's Department; from June 2015: permanent Deputy CEO; 2018 and part of 2019: Acting CEO when Greg Shanahan, who is here today, was off for a year.

Your Honour would often be sent to attend meetings of the Australian Attorneys-General on behalf of the Northern Territory. The Attorney was often not able to go personally and instead arranged for the most senior and competent lawyer to tell the other Attorneys' what's what.

Your Honour is hands-on, practical and not one to sit idle.

For example, as an Acting Associate Judge and Acting Supreme Court Judge, Your Honour introduced a number of reforms including digitising court files, overhauling the legal practitioner's admissions process, reviewing the procedures in the probate jurisdiction and assuming responsibility for managing criminal listings, especially in Alice Springs.

Your Honour is also practical in the home - and not blind to your husband's deficiencies.

You and Steve had recently gotten new neighbours at your home in Fannie Bay. One afternoon, Steve answered a knock on the door. It was the new neighbour kindly informing him that one of his sprinklers on the front lawn was broken. Steve was very grateful for the information, expressed his gratitude, and before closing the door said to the neighbour "I will tell my wife".

Your Honour is a hard worker, starting the day with a coffee – the dawn beverage of any industrious worker. A cappuccino to be exact.

Your Honour often works late into the evening and thus some people refer to you as Meredith Day and Night.

Likewise, Greg Shanahan tells a story of a dinner party at Fannie Bay Super Pizza shortly after Your Honour was appointed a Judge of the Local Court. The festivities were in full swing when Greg noticed that the newly minted Judge was reading something. Challenging Your Honour as to what could possibly be so interesting, Your Honour sheepishly produced the Sentencing Act.

Your Honour also calls it as she sees it, whether as a part of a discussion or in an email. There is no beating around the bush. A spade is a spade.

And don't get on her wrong side. Your Honour's family still recalls when your little brother Andrew, a mere two years old at the time, had gotten you angry at the farm one day. You took him under your arm and he was commandeered outside for the purpose of administering punishment. His desperate pleas for mercy were a matter of supreme indifference to you. First the sentence. Then the trial. "I am feeding you to the pigs".

Your Honour left Admiralty House in the second half of 2019 following your appointment as a Local Court Judge in Alice Springs. Your husband had recently retired from practice and joined you in the Red Centre.

One of your roles was to head the first Safe Domestic Violence court in the Northern Territory in Alice Springs in October 2020. You described it to the media at the time as a therapeutic court - a court where there is often direct interactions between the judge and the parties.

As the former Deputy Chief Executive Officer, you had been a driving force behind the setting up of that court. It involved a major renovation to the Local Court building, the setting up of a specialist court room, the construction of separate entrances and also a specialist court list.

Your Honour drafted the practice directions and presided over the cases.

The persons involved in the process have since remarked on Your Honour's warmth and kindness.

In November 2021 Your Honour was appointed Acting Associate Judge in Darwin and then later in Alice Springs. In May last year Your Honour was appointed an Acting Judge of this Court on then of course on 11 June this year, a permanent Judge.

As I remarked, never one to sit idle.

Your Honour has always showed a willingness to help others including those at the Attorney-General's Department who were taking your place as you moved up the rungs of the ladder.

Your Honour has never been short of courage beginning when as a child you volunteered for the position of goalkeeper for your field hockey team. Courage that you have demonstrated time and time again by taking on new responsibilities as they became available.

This brings me back to the Titanic blueprint that is still with you and to what that print may mean.

Captain Edward John Smith managed a mere four days. Captain Huntingford is still going strong, and going stronger, after what is now close to 40 years.

You are sure to keep us all safe.

On behalf of the Attorney, I thank Your Honour for agreeing to serve on the bench of this Honourable Court.

May it please the court.

GRANT CJ: Thank you, Mr Solicitor.

Yes, Madam President.

MS CHALMERS SC: Your Honour, I rise to speak on behalf of the barristers of the Northern Territory.

In preparing for today, I too spoke with numerous members of the profession and was invariably told '*Meredith's a very private person – but did you know she grew up on a farm in a really small town in South Australia*'. Very few could actually remember the name of the town.

The town as the learned Solicitor-General has just mentioned was in fact Lameroo near the South Australia/ Victorian border. Today it has a population of around 500. It is remote, prone to drought and no-one knows what the name Lameroo actually means.

However, how Lameroo got its name is a matter of historical record. Apparently a Postal & Telegraph inspector, one Mr Johnston, was passing through the area in 1932. Mr Johnston was invited to a meeting of early settlers. The settlers were arguing about a name for their emerging township, no doubt to try and get people to stop referring to it as Woop Woop. Inspector Johnston entered the debate seeing as he was there, and suggested they consider Lameroo, telling the enthralled settlers that its "euphony appealed to him" and that he had already bestowed the same name on a little Bay in the Northern Territory between the hospital and the gaol. Surely this historic link is no coincidence and must explain how it is that Your Honour came to reside in Darwin, the home of Lameroo Beach on the Esplanade not far from where we are sitting today.

I initially imagined Your Honour leaving Lameroo 2 as a young woman with plans to travel to the wilds of the Territory to explore the first Lameroo. Around that time, in the 1970's, Lameroo Beach was the Territory's answer to the Haight Ashbury district and home to a commune of up to 400 hippies.

But for all those who are picturing Justice Huntingford with flowers in her hair, peacing out on the sands of Lameroo Beach to the strains of *Are You Going to San Francisco*, you are about to be disappointed. For one thing, the Lameroo Beach commune was disbanded by the time Your Honour was ready to leave home.

It was the observation of one Lameroo 2 historian that the women who made their home in the Mallee scrub were a stalwart and gallant band. I think a more accurate picture of your Honour is of a stalwart and gallant young woman following a more traditional path, moving to Adelaide where you completed studies in Law and Arts. Your Honour also completed a Masters in Law in due course.

Shortly after your graduation and admission to the Supreme Court of South Australia, you arrived in Darwin in 1987 to take up employment with local firm Waters James O'Neill then later with Elston & Gilchrist. That firm was a then affiliate of Hunt



& Hunt lawyers in Victoria and NSW. You became a partner of that firm together with the late Ian Morris. This was no small matter at the time. In the 1990's Your Honour was one of only three or four female partners out of about 80 in the national Hunt & Hunt group at the time. This was no doubt a matter of inspiration for the women lawyers who worked in the firm.

I am told you were the commercial law brains trust of the outfit and were known for your ordered, precise and concise work in that area. Lawyers would apparently at times queue outside your office for the benefit of your assistance. You also showed early prowess in the area of Human Resource Management sometimes having to act as a foil to your then partner Mr Morris who tended to have a less modern approach. For example, on one occasion Mr Morris loudly directed the new article clerk to go down to the Lands Titles Office to get a copy of an oral contract. The clerk dashed off eagerly to the Lands Titles Office before Your Honour could intervene. When he returned much later very down on himself having been unable to find the oral contract anywhere, and reporting the same to Mr Morris, you very kindly intervened to stop Mr Morris from setting the next assignment. I am told that you were a great mentor to young lawyers during your days at the firm.

In 2001 you left and took on a variety of public sector roles including lecturing at Charles Darwin University predominantly in torts and professional practice. You also then combined that work with an appointment as Judicial Registrar of the Local Court working alongside then Judicial Registrar Tanya Fong Lim. You impressed your colleagues in being able to juggle your university workload with your court responsibilities, but also I am told on the hockey field where Your Honour played goalie for Waratahs. This was surely the natural position for a stalwart and gallant woman from the Mallee scrub to play.

Can I just pause here and invite everyone present to picture themselves standing in the goals on a hockey field, in the Darwin wet season, as twenty athletic women run straight towards you all wielding sticks, half of them with hostile intent and looking for an opportunity to send a lethal object flying straight at you with maximum velocity, very often at head height. I think one of those women at times was quite possibly Nova Peris.

No wonder Your Honour is able to maintain your calm demeanour on the Bench no matter how raucous counsel get, or how tense a case becomes. I make special note on behalf of counsel who appear before you as to how appreciated your pleasant and calm demeanour on the bench is.

Of course, Your Honour played goalie back in the day when you only had a pair of cricket pads to protect you from sudden death. Helmets and face protectors had yet to be invented, a fact I hear Your Honour occasionally likes to mention to the current generation of hockey goalies.

Your Honour went on, as we have heard, to work at the Solicitor for the Northern Territory including as Director of Litigation representing clients in a wide variety of

litigation matters, and later working as Deputy Chief Executive Officer and Acting Chief Executive Officer for a good period of time. One of Your Honour's little known achievements from that period is being the legal voice of reason that killed off the brilliant concept of a mobile pub to be called the Booze Bus.

Despite that, you were successfully appointed to the Local Court Bench in 2019.

Your Honour, I think it is fair to say that you are the quintessential quiet achiever. It was actually quite difficult, probably because I am not the Solicitor-General, to get information about your achievements. Those who have worked with you have described you as intelligent, extraordinarily diligent, very ordered in your thinking and your work. Your Chief Judge from your days on the Local Court bench recalls the extraordinary amount of preparation you did to be able to deal with the criminal matters that were to form the bulk of your work in that court. I don't know if she knows about you taking the Sentencing Act to dinner, however.

You are also routinely described as kind and certainly that was my experience of you when I worked at the Director of Public Prosecutions and you were the Deputy Chief Executive Officer of the department. One might say Your Honour is ideal Judge material.

Those who know you on a personal level know that at the same time as you achieved professionally, you managed to raise three amazing children with the aid of your husband, Steve. You have produced a doctor and an architect and you have one child still at university. You have also been extraordinarily resilient in the face of very difficult personal circumstances. I really think that the steely determination of hockey goalie might be your most dominant trait, consistent with your Mallee scrub heritage.

In case those present should form the view that Your Honour doesn't take the time to stop and smell the roses, I have been told of a time when you and Steve did a multi-day bush walk in the Katherine region with a group of friends. Everyone had carefully packed the bare essentials to keep their packs as light as possible and so were stunned to see the Huntingfords' produce red wine and chocolates having been grizzling slightly all day about their heavy packs. I am also told that Your Honour takes a moment to find enjoyment in the everyday, including while riding your electric bike to work in the mornings. Apparently Your Honour delights in riding quietly up behind lawyers who are likewise riding to work, and then quickly switching your bike into turbo drive, rocketing past them leaving them dazed in your wake. Your old colleague Ian Morris would certainly approve and I am sure he would have been a very enthusiastic and proud supporter of your appointment if he were with us here today.

Your Honour has also been an innovator during your career and the Solicitor-General has mentioned some of your achievements in that regard including the development of the domestic violence specialist court. When your honour was appointed an Acting Associate Justice of the Supreme Court, you continued in that

innovation. Perhaps one that is worth mentioning is as far back as 2004 while at the University you were writing about utilising online audio tutorials and content platforms to foster engagement between external students in the CDU Law programme, at a time when many other universities were not offering external Law studies. Those types of innovations have led to the online capacity that the Law School has today.

I have not listed by any means all of Your Honour's professional achievements.

Your Honour brings to the Supreme Court Bench not only your considerable legal capacity, but a deep and practical knowledge of many facets of the Northern Territory justice system. Those factors, combined with your admirable personal traits, make you a very worthy appointment to our Bench and on behalf of the independent bar we wish you every success.

GRANT CJ: Thank you, Madam President.

Mr Henschke.

MR HENSCHKE: Thank you, Your Honour. May it please the Court I rise to welcome Justice Meredith Day Huntingford and speak on behalf of the legal practitioners of the Northern Territory.

Whenever I receive an invitation from the Chief Justice to address this Honourable Court, I always ask myself that existential question, what meaningful contribution can I make? I then reach for *Mandatory Reading*, my source of pertinent information about legal practitioners and judges. And there was not one mention of Your Honour to be found. Meredith Day Huntingford was not on Sheila and Peter Forrest's radar when they wrote the book, and *Big Boss Fella* was not much help either. So, off I went to Google.

What is clear from Your Honour's presence in the Google world is that Your Honour has a long and distinguished career in the law. But I knew that. And if there was any doubt that Your Honour has a most distinguished career, the Solicitor-General and Northern Territory Bar Association President have comprehensively dispelled that doubt.

May I say that Your Honour's appointment as a Judge of the Supreme Court of the Northern Territory was enthusiastically and unanimously welcomed by the Legal profession.

In my capacity as President of the Law Society, I am consulted by the Judicial Appointments Panel and asked to comment on appointments to this Honourable Court.

Concerning Your Honour's appointment, when I was consulted I considered, briefly, is it appropriate to simply offer my comment with a response out of 10, as one often does when asked to offer a review? I did not. Decorum got the better of me.

If I had assessed Your Honour's potential appointment on a sliding scale out of 10, I would have responded with a 10/10, and also a 'highly likely to refer you to my friends and colleagues'.

For a very long time I have observed the hatching and dispatching of many fine Judges of this Honourable Court and Your Honour's ascendancy to this Honourable Court is no exception. In your pre-Judge life, your intelligence, kindness and careful demeanour stood out.

On your appointment as a Local Court Judge and an Acting Associate Judge of this Court, those attributes continued to stand out.

Your values, interpersonal skills, abilities and leadership were very evident.

There is a document entitled 'Suggested Criteria for Judicial Appointments' commissioned by the Australian Institute of Judicial Administration. Your Honour was made for those criteria, and those criteria were made for Your Honour.

By way of edited highlights of those criteria, and the perfect match, Your Honour is clearly able to quickly absorb and analyse complex competing facts and legal argument.

Your Honour respects all individuals and communities served by Courts, treats others with respect and so inspires respect and confidence.

Your Honour exercises authority calmly and professionally, particularly when challenged. And Your Honour demonstrates an ability to appropriately engage with a wide range of court participants including skilled or unskilled legal representatives, represented and unrepresented parties, witnesses, and court staff.

Reflecting on the 'Suggested Criteria for Judicial Appointments' stirred a vivid memory of Your Honour.

Shortly after Your Honour became an Acting Associate Judge, I appeared before you in a settlement conference. As I walked into the conference room, I saw that teleconferencing facilities, including large screens, had appeared as if by magic.

I was not expecting that.

By way of background, for some time the profession had wistfully considered the possibility of the idea that on occasion, parties or their counsel, might remotely attend a settlement conference. It seemed that perhaps there was a slight reluctance to embrace that possibility.

As I stood in the conference room, I felt like a child who had decided to run away from home and join the circus. Picture this, if you will. A child asks one parent if it would it be okay to practice knife throwing skills using a younger sibling so that the

runaway would be circus job ready. That request is refused and that refusal accepted with polite resignation.

And then, the runaway's other parent says, would you like to practice your knife throwing skills, I'm sure your younger sibling would like to help.

When I saw the teleconferencing facilities, I was as surprised as the aspiring knife thrower undoubtedly was.

Your Honour had used resources efficiently and effectively and introduced and managed change.

Perhaps Your Honour's next challenge is to complete Justice Barr's idea being the idea that grew from a small idea to a much bigger idea. I speak of the Rope Descent Training for Judges idea. So concerned was his Honour about the welfare of Judges of this Court, that he spoke about the idea at the Ceremonial Sitting to farewell him. He no doubt mentioned the big idea with the intent of passing the baton to you.

You will no doubt recall that this idea is to ensure that Judges can safely rappel from the sixth floor veranda in the event of an emergency. This proposal really deserves to be reinvigorated. The idea of a small step ladder to assist Judges to clamber over the top bar of the balustrade on the sixth floor could be the clincher. Your Honour's proven skills in efficiently and effectively managing and introducing change may well result in the spectacle of Judges of this Honourable Court repelling from the sixth floor veranda.

The flow on effect would be enormous, no doubt a new edition of *Big Boss Fella* would be published. The idea could be a unique team building exercise, I think.

On behalf of the legal profession of the Northern Territory, I welcome you to the Supreme Court. You have the qualities and competencies needed for the extraordinarily important role that a Judge of the Supreme Court of the Northern Territory plays in the administration of justice.

GRANT CJ: Thank you, Mr President.

Justice Huntingford, would you like to respond?

HUNTINGFORD J: Thank you, Chief Justice.

Your Honour the Administrator, Professor Hugh Heggie and Ms Ruth Jones, Chief Justice and fellow Judges of this Court, Chief Judge and Judges of the Local Court, Judge Liveris, past Judges of the Supreme Court, Solicitor-General, Mr Christrup, President of the Bar Association, Ms Chalmers, Law Society President, Mr Henschke, members of the bar, members of the legal profession generally, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen. Thank you all for your attendance here today.

Thank you Mr Solicitor, Ms Chalmers and Mr Henschke for those very warm and generous remarks. I sincerely appreciate the time and effort that you have put into the preparation, especially chasing down all those details which I had hoped to forget.

On an occasion such as this it is appropriate to celebrate, although it is somewhat overwhelming to hear all those nice things said about me. Another Judge on a similar occasion described the speeches as akin to a living eulogy. That is pretty close to the mark. Of course, as with a eulogy, sometimes the truth is lost in the telling, and for those who relied upon information from my husband, I apologise. He told me, with apparent glee, that he never let the facts get in the way of a good story.

There are many people who I would like to thank for their support, encouragement and, occasionally, a little push; which I have relied upon to get to this point.

As you know I held an appointment as an Acting Judge of this court for about 12 months before I was appointed in June. Prior to that I acted in the position of Associate Judge. The welcome and collegiate support I have received from the Chief Justice and the Judges of this court has been outstanding and I am very grateful for it.

I also want to thank all of the court staff, my Associates and Executive Assistants over the last few years, and the Sheriff and Registrars and their staff both here in Darwin and in Alice Springs and not forgetting Executive. I look forward to continuing to work with all of you. I also want to thank Debbie Carr for all of the work she has done in organising today, on top of everything else she has to do.

I particularly want to thank all of you for attending today. It is a great sign of support for the Court that you have attended this ceremony to celebrate with me and I very much appreciate that you took the time to do so. In thanking you I also want to include those attending via video link in Alice Springs. There are also some who have travelled from Alice Springs and from interstate to be here today, and I thank them for making that special effort.

Prior to December 2021, I was sitting as a Local Court Judge, primarily in Alice Springs but also in Darwin, Katherine, Tennant Creek and on circuit. I wish to express my appreciation to all Local Court Judges and the staff of that court in its various locations. I especially thank Chief Judge Elizabeth Morris and Deputy Chief Judges Tanya Fong Lim and John Birch for their support and encouragement while I was finding my judicial feet on that court. I also want to give a special mention to Sandra Cronin in Alice Springs for her unstinting and unflappable administrative support. Deputy Chief Judge Birch was one of the people who encouraged me to apply to be considered for appointment to the Local Court and managed to convince me over a glass of wine in Alice Springs that it would all be absolutely fine, despite my limited experience in criminal law. Although on reflection, he may have omitted

from his overview a few key details such as the number of cases and just how fast one needs to work.

I remember my time as a Local Court Judge in Alice Springs as one of the best jobs I have ever had. The collegiate environment, the beauty of the landscape and the opportunity to go on circuit was something I particularly enjoyed, although not so much the road to Arparra where I thought the court Prado would possibly disappear in the crevasses which gaped across the road every few kilometres.

Ali Curung is also memorable for the number of dogs that took an interest in proceedings. I was suspicious of one particularly fine looking canine with a special collar which sat at the feet of defence counsel whenever he stood up to make submissions. Eventually he rather sheepishly admitted that he could not bear to leave the animal alone, so she had to come along. She was very well behaved. And of course, flying out to Kintore over the West Macdonnell Ranges in February after rain, watching the water cascading off the ranges, is a memory I will have forever.

As to my career in the law prior to that time, I am one of those who came to the Northern Territory for three months and never left. My introduction to Darwin was due to my old school friend, Cris Cureton. At the time, travelling to Darwin for a summer clerkship with my friend seemed like a great adventure, although when I arrived on 5 December 1985, feet sticking to the tar as I walked to the old Airport terminal, I resolved to go back to Adelaide as soon as I could afford the fare. As it turned out, settling in was greatly aided by the presence here at the time of my dear university friend Tanya Heaslip, who cannot abide social isolation. She went the extra mile by introducing me to my husband.

Over the course of my career I have been fortunate to be guided by several remarkable mentors. John Waters, my first boss at Waters James & O'Neill taught me about hard work and not giving up. However, I would not have survived those early years without the support of colleagues including Garry Schneider, Kelvin Strange, Brenda Monaghan, Guy Riley and Cathy Spurr. We all faced an immense workload and in my case, a steep learning curve, but somehow we survived and, mostly, thrived.

John was not all that impressed when I went to work for Ian McDonald Morris at Elston & Gilchrist. He said "why would you want to save money for insurance companies", or something along those lines.....

Working with Ian Morris was, however, one of the highlights of my career. Morrie had a quick wit and incredible legal brain. He taught me how to think like a lawyer but also how to have fun, sometimes arguably too much fun, while working hard. And he encouraged me to have faith in myself. Something I still work on. Morrie and I became firm friends and I acknowledge the great support of Jill Morris, and of course the dynamic duo Peggy Cheong and Chris Osborne together with others including Bill Piper, Ashley Heath, Greg Macdonald and Tanya Ling.

During that time some usually opposing solicitors became close friends too and I particularly acknowledge Katharine Philp who has travelled from Brisbane to be here today and I thank her for that and for her steadfast friendship and support over the years.

While lecturing at the university I was fortunate to have as my boss, Ned Aughterson. The opportunity to teach broadened my understanding and perspective of the law. During that time I worked with and learnt from Ned and other proper academics like Bill Heard and Jesse Wu. Teaching and researching was a great privilege. It is always gratifying when former students pop up around the place in Court. Many of them are now quite advanced in their own careers.

I also had the privilege of working with many outstanding people at the Solicitor for the Northern Territory and throughout government from 2005 to 2019. I was and am in awe of many of them. It is a great joy to see so many former colleagues from the Solicitor for the Northern Territory, the Attorney-General's Department and NTG more broadly, in attendance. I want to give a special mention to Greg Shanahan, a person with a keen understanding of legal issues and master of navigating the public service. While no-one could match his expertise, Greg's guidance equipped me with the skills necessary to effectively work in government. I very much value my friendship with Greg and Rachael and it is lovely that they are able to be here today also.

Outside of the law I have been fortunate to have friendships which have sustained Steve and me in our life in Darwin, and also during our time in Alice Springs. All of you are important to us and I thank you for your attendance also.

I of course want to acknowledge my family. The foundation for my life was set by my parents on the farm at Wilkawatt near Lameroo where I grew up with my three siblings, Andrew, Bronwyn and Lindsey. My brothers, their wives, my dear sister and all of my wonderful nieces and nephews continue to be a huge part in our family life and I was surprised and pleased to see my brother and sister-in-law here today.

I am absolutely thrilled that my mum, Kathryn, is able to be here today to share in this celebration. As a teacher, her belief in the power of education set the course for my life and that of my siblings. My dad passed away some years ago now but I know that he would have been proud today, and probably somewhat embarrassed about all the fuss.

For the last 38 years I have spent my life with Steve. What can I say, most of you know him. In seriousness, he has provided, despite his questionable taste in footwear, unwavering love and support, and I thank him for it. Our proudest achievements are our three children, Kate, Tom and Emma. It is wonderful that Kate and Emma are here today. Tom is in Italy furthering his dedication to architecture.

A few people have said to me in light of my previous appointment, "at least you know what you are getting into". There is obviously some truth in that but it also gave me pause for thought.



The work of a judicial officer, and the practice of the law more generally, is sometimes difficult. We are tasked with an immense responsibility. At times our work involves robust debate, and it often requires courage. Alongside those things we should not lose sight of the human dimension. The court is the institution to which we are dedicated, and at the same time our workplace. The pressure of work is significant, both in volume and complexity. It is unsurprising in that circumstance that we must all do our best to look after our health. That is not always an easy task. I thank all of those who have assisted me including as counsel and instructing solicitors over the last five years, and I look forward to your help in future. Your hard work is appreciated. I also urge you all to continue to take the time to look after yourselves.

I am deeply grateful for the opportunity to serve the Northern Territory community as a Judge of this Court. I pledge to carry out my duties with diligence, integrity, and dedication. Your presence here today strengthens my resolve to fulfil this role to the best of my abilities.

Once again, thank you for your support and for sharing in this significant moment.

GRANT CJ: Thank you, Justice Huntingford.

Mr Henschke, just so you know, Justice Huntingford has taken over as the Chair of the Supreme Court library and abseiling committee from Justice Barr. As we expected, she is making a far better fist of it. She has already produced preliminary design drawings of a flying fox which will take us from the sixth-floor balcony directly into the café of the new art gallery; something Justice Barr never conceived of.

Thank you all for your presence here today. We are honoured by your attendance and we invite you to join us for refreshments in the Court foyer.

The Court will now adjourn.

SHERIFF'S OFFICER: Silence, all stand. This Honourable court now stands adjourned. God save the King.

ADJOURNED 9:56 AM INDEFINITELY