

RSB:SND

IN THE DISTRICT COURT
OF NEW SOUTH WALES

THE CHIEF JUDGE
THE HONOURABLE JUSTICE D PRICE AM
AND THE JUDGES OF THE COURT

MONDAY 22 NOVEMBER 2021

**SWEARING-IN CEREMONY OF MAGISTRATE ELLEN SKINNER AS A
JUDGE OF THE DISTRICT COURT OF NEW SOUTH WALES AND
PRESIDENT OF THE CHILDREN'S COURT OF NEW SOUTH WALES**

The Honourable M Speakman SC MP, Attorney-General, on behalf of the New South Wales Bar
Ms Juliana Warner, President Law Society of New South Wales

(COMMISSION READ)

(AFFIRMATIONS OF OFFICE TAKEN)

PRICE J: Judge Skinner, on behalf of all the judges of the Court I warmly congratulate you and wish you every success in your important role as President of the Children's Court of New South Wales.

JUDGE SKINNER: Thank you, Chief Judge.

PRICE J: Attorney.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL: I begin by acknowledging the traditional custodians of the land on which we gather, the Gadigal people of the Eora Nation, and pay my respects to their elders, past, present and emerging.

Your Honour, Judge Skinner, on behalf of the State and the Bar it is my great pleasure to congratulate you on your appointment as President of the Children's Court and as a judge of the District Court of New South Wales. I also acknowledge and congratulate your family members here today, your partner Judge Gartelmann, your children Sam Leckie and Eliza, your parents Jan and Lindsay, your younger sister Jess and her partner Billy and children

RSB:SND

Ned and Josie, your older sister Clare, her partner Sven, and children Mary and Fred and now to your Honour.

Your families, friends and colleagues memories and anecdotes portray an empathetic and charismatic judicial officer with the big picture vision to innovate and focus on improving outcomes for children. You grew up in Chatswood as the middle child. You attended Artarmon Public School and were in the opportunity class. You relished all the creative activities this afforded. Projects like producing your own newspaper helped foster your creative streak.

Dinner table conversation in the Skinner family was an important evening ritual. Your parents liked to bring friends into the fold to take part. They included you and your sisters in adult conversations about social issues. Not everyone who came along saw it as the fun family ritual that you all did. One schoolfriend once remarked 'that's not a dinner conversation that looked like sport' but blood sport or not you excelled at it. The aim of the game was to be interesting and funny. From early age you showed an exceptional ability with your oratory skills and dramatic timing. The rest of the family knew you couldn't be beaten. Your father often referred to you as silver tongued though your sister says there may have been a further adjective involved that I won't put on the record but this gives us an idea of the competitive nature there.

You were only allowed to watch television on a Friday afternoon. You followed creative pursuits like painting and drawing and did well at sport playing volleyball, netball and touch football. You were a vociferous reader. You and your sisters also played in a school jazz band. You were their Miles Davis playing the trumpet. The trumpet took you touring to the United States. Your parents were and are your great cheerleaders and brought you and your

RSB:SND

sisters up to believe you could do anything. You were school captain at Chatswood High. You were popular with your peers and your enthusiasm was well known for drawing people in.

Your parents had some family friends, Ray and Jack Graham, who would often come to dinner. They would have a profound effect on you. They're one of the reasons you're being sworn in here today. Jack was a prisoner's lawyer for Legal Aid. I'm told he was not just an extraordinary story teller but also an extraordinary force of nature. Jack Graham was often on parole boards. He spoke about the experiences of perpetrators. This wasn't an angle or insight many people grow up thinking about. Jack instilled an awareness in you of people who commit crime or are accused of crime. It was formative and has stayed with you ever since. Because of Jack your sense of social justice and because of your talent with words it was natural that you'd pursue a career in the law. You were elated to gain entry to Arts/Law at the Australian National University and finally be on your way to following this path.

After graduating you worked for a Sydney legal practice and were admitted as a legal practitioner in the year 2000. Following this was a brief stint researching and writing for television. You worked on a drama series with the working title of 'Prosecutor'. This later became 'Young Lions', a show set in a Sydney police station starring a young Alex Demetriades. It wasn't long after that you applied for a job in the Children's Legal Service at Legal Aid. The senior solicitor at the time still clearly remembers your cover letter. It stated something to the effect of I would love nothing more than to work in the Children's Legal Service. The senior solicitor had never read a cover letter that was so passionate, she hired you. She is very pleased she did. That senior solicitor is now the State Coroner, her Honour Teresa O'Sullivan. At

RSB:SND

Legal Aid you were true to that passion expressed in your cover letter. You became known for roping everyone in to help with the cause from legal stakeholders and different interest groups to even getting your parents to volunteer their services. Your father, a retired architect, carried out renovations while your mother took on office work looking after spreadsheets, correspondence and overseeing the books.

Your Honour also worked for the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions where you gained a reputation as a very competent lawyer with empathy, compassion and kindness. Following this you were managing solicitor at the Aboriginal Legal Service. Here you gained a reputation for your diligence and your careful and warm organisation of people and cases. You were known as the master of work charts, spreadsheets and careful planning of cases and your staff. You were also an open door manager within limits. While your door was always open on your desk was a hand-crafted stop like device... If the green arm was up you were open for all advice and questions, orange was less inviting, red said 'my door is always open but'.

In 2009 your Honour was appointed to the bench. You were and remain to be the youngest magistrate ever appointed in New South Wales. When some media appeared questioning your age and experience his Honour, Judge Henson , called your mother to assure her that not only would you be looked after by collegiate peers but he had observed you in court and was absolutely certain of your clear-headed ability on the bench; incidentally, your mother agreed.

On the bench as Magistrate Skinner you've been considerate, direct and plain-speaking. I am told you haven't shied away from stern sentences. At one point you sent a former police inspector to gaol for lying to the Police

RSB:SND

Integrity Commission taking no pleasure in sending a necessary signal about lying to watchdog agencies. You've always explained clearly in understandable language your reasons for judicial decisions. Your openness as a judicial decision-maker has been a clear strength, particularly in the Children's Court.

Throughout your career your contribution to the legal profession has been significant. You are known as someone who enthusiastically volunteers to be on committees and give talks and workshops. As the Legal Aid solicitor for the Children's Legal Service at the Children's Court you often spoke with Judge Dive of the Drug Court about how to get services to assist the Court in doing better. It was the start of a big picture vision that you'd become known for. Your aim is not merely to process cases but to strive for continuous improvement by looking how the courts, the service system and the government can work together to improve outcomes for children. Diverting children from the criminal justice system is something you've been committed to as the Broadmeadow Children's Court magistrate. This has included focusing on rehabilitation and diversion options for Aboriginal young people and engaging with available local Aboriginal community groups.

Earlier in your role you contacted a colleague in what is now the Department of Communities and Justice to look at how the service system and government could work together to help ensure children would not return to the Court. This involved linking together child protection, youth justice, education, health and police. You brought them together as an inter-agency group to improve the outcomes for children coming before the Court for criminal matters and your Honour did this in your characteristic style holding morning teas, baking your famous brownies, bringing everyone together to build

RSB:SND

relationships. You harnessed these occasions to talk about some of the things you were seeing that needed work and the ways to best meet the needs of children in the service system.

You were known for being very collegiate. You focused on birthdays for work colleagues and friends and are always the organiser pulling together videos and treasure hunts. In these videos you made an artform of photographing Lego mini figures in exotic, unusual and sometimes compromising locations. These activities were designed to help people know how special they are and to help everyone celebrate. The 'flash mob' you organised at last year's magistrates' conference was particularly memorable for many. During COVID you found interesting ways to keep your colleagues connected. You set challenges for people in video and in message consistently to keep the communication going. You are the second fastest runner on the Children's Court bench. You were the silver medallist at the inaugural Children's Court 100 metre dash this year, admittedly there were only two entrants. Your sister reports that while you are good at almost everything you are a terrible dancer. That's curious because your colleagues report otherwise. They say your Honour is an enthusiastic and graceful dancer and their proof is in seeing you master the famous lift from Dirty Dancing on your first attempt.

You are known to have unrivalled enthusiasm, drive and a disarming personality capable of convincing your judicial brothers and sisters to join strange web groups for jokes and emojis, participating in competitive judicial education seminars, text bomb each other on special occasions and post videos of themselves singing and dancing to encourage each other through COVID lockdowns. You're thought to be one of the only judicial officers who

RSB:SND

bring cake to court user meetings, decorate the court offices for Halloween, play handball and like to go down to the beach in the dark and the wet to experience the sunrise. You are not so good, I'm told, at jumping off desks or riding your bike to work.

Judge Skinner, you bring to the bench your ability to bring people together, creativity, big picture vision, empathy and kindness. Your appointment acknowledges the skills, expertise and specialist knowledge you've acquired throughout your service to the law and your hard work, dedication and personal sacrifice. In the words of the great trumpet player, Miles Davis, it's not about standing still and becoming safe if anyone wants to keep creating they have to be about change. From the outset of your career you've had that big picture vision to innovate. There is no place where creativity and enthusiasm for collaboration and improvement is more important than in the New South Wales Children's Court. Congratulations and the warmest of wishes for your continuing career on the bench.

PRICE J: Thank you, Attorney. President Warner.

MS WARNER: I acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which we gather, the Gadigal people of the Eora Nation, and I pay my respects to their elders, past, present and emerging and I acknowledge and extend my respect to any Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who may be present today.

President Skinner, how exciting is that. The news of your appointment has been met with universal delight. In fact, one of my fellow counsellors just kept repeating delight, have I told you what a delight she is to appear in front of, she's just delightful, have I told you that yet - yes, you've told me, she's a delight, I got that point. So the State solicitors are confident that you will make

RSB:SND

this position your own in a way that profoundly benefits the children of this State.

As President of the Law Society of New South Wales I welcome the appointment of a solicitor to this role and of another extraordinarily accomplished woman to the Court. Your Honour's ability to see the justice system as a force for good in each child's life and your commitment to improving outcomes for young people will bring a powerful perspective to your leadership of the Children's Court. Your Honour has a valued background as both a prosecution and Legal Aid lawyer, a further two interesting experiences earlier in your life authoring a novel about young people and working as the researcher for a TV criminal law drama foreshadowed a career at the law concerned with the lives of youth while at Legal Aid you juggled a high volume of work in various locations including Tamworth and Burwood and jurisdictions including the Local Court, the District Court and the Children's Court. Colleagues remember you being engaged in a practical way with clients, often sitting down and drawing diagrams to help illustrate a point.

Your time as manager of the Aboriginal Legal Service at Redfern is remembered for your energy, enthusiasm and capacity to effect change. You wanted to understand not only how things work but how they could work better. You were both a disciplined manager of court rostering, a master of spreadsheets and workflows and a supportive sounding board approachable for clients and your Honour demonstrated a real apprehension of the systemic issues faced by clients, particularly indigenous clients. From the time of your appointment as a magistrate your Honour began in the Local Court serving at the Downing Centre, the Hunter Valley and North Sydney and then in the Children's Court at Broadmeadow and Surry Hills. As a children's magistrate

RSB:SND

you raised awareness of under-diagnosed and under-assessed foetal alcohol spectrum disorder among children engaged in the justice system and you promoted a whole of life span perspective on the social and neuro-developmental context of offending.

Your Honour has a great sense of initiative in bringing stakeholders together. You effectively linked local young people caught in a cycle of repeat offending who appeared destined for gaol with big brother mentors from the Newcastle Knights creating relationships based in respect and admiration. You also presented at local schools working closely with both students and principals. Your vision of juvenile justice is holistic, individualised and grounded in real life. In reference to the Children's Court foyer you once said if the foyer is going well the Court can run well, the foyer is an opportunity to engage with young people and their families to try to overcome obstacles and to work together.

While at Broadmeadow you instigated pilot programs bringing stakeholders around one table, often over morning tea, where educators, academics, departmental representatives and police all worked together at your initiative inspired by your Honour to think beyond the ways that things are normally done and find creative solutions to seemingly intractable problems. The profession anticipates that you will develop new and innovative ways of breaking cycles of offending having witnessed your willingness to go out on a limb and do brave and vulnerable things for the sake of others.

On the bench you've displayed kindness to those before you. Have I actually said what a delight you are to appear in front of; firm when you need to be but pleasant, accessible and never short of a smile. You excel in communicating in direct and comprehensible language with lawyers and youth

RSB:SND

alike. You also use quite direct non-verbal communication to correct matters if lawyers are, by contrast, being incomprehensible or wordy. Your Honour's care for the profession means you will pick up the phone to ensure colleagues are okay if they're sitting in a registry alone or sit down to eat with somebody who is sitting by themselves. You're alive to practice development and welfare issues in a courtroom and attentive to the progress of young lawyers and I remember discussing that with you the first time we met. Young solicitors need look no further than your Honour for an exemplar and encouragement because you were the youngest ever appointed magistrate in New South Wales which is just amazing.

Your Honour's close-knit family, mum and dad Jan and Lindsay, hiding around there, your sisters, the creative genius I'm told the spies say, Jess, and the recently appointed President of the Australasian College of Emergency Medicine, Clare, your partner, Judge Tim Gartelmann, hiding up in the back row and children Sam, Leckie and Eliza sitting there, you should be so proud of your mum, it's just such a wonderful day for her. They are immensely proud of you.

Now, notably, you became a mum while in the role of magistrate so that is a pretty rare path to tread but one you walked with aplomb. Your enthusiasm and engagement in your children's lives has imbued them with enjoyment and interest. This appointment means your Honour and Judge Gartelmann are now colleagues now sharing not just your love of family but also a commission as judges of the District Court.

As a friend and colleague your Honour is loyal and steadfast so students of the five love languages would not dispute that your Honour's preferred language is that of imaginative gift-giving. Some friends have been lucky

RSB:SND

enough to be in receipt of that rare offering from your Honour, not a candle or diffuser which would be my first choice, but a birthday rap. Your Honour is known for your crack of dawn wakeups and you used to ride into work to Broadmeadow early via the early track. While in Newcastle you ensured that by the time your colleagues woke up each morning they'd receive one of your famous sunrise photos. Your Honour also has a reputation for fine baking with your brownies and cookies particularly relished. Other magistrates have bemoaned that you are putting them to shame because they can't do as well with their brownies.

Even when faced with the mundane of tasks your Honour sees an opportunity to inject fun. My spies, and there are many of them, tell me that you bring mischief and magic to the lives of those around you and you're not afraid to use humour as a point of connection in court. Your Honour is famously tenacious and a force to be reckoned with in and out of court. When on a trip to New York you learned that Billy Joel was doing his anniversary concert there and so it became your mission to get invited out on to his boat. I don't know if you did or not but you can tell me later over a cup of tea. Similarly, you discovered Hugh Jackman was having a premier performance in Manhattan and you were convinced that you could get to meet him waiting for hours at the bottom of the venue's escalator for that purpose. When it was suggested this might be a fruitless exercise you responded 'we're Australian, of course he'll let us in'.

So, unafraid to put yourself out there you recently performed a skit with a fellow magistrate in a take-off of the Chief Magistrate's suggestion box. In your last moments walking on to the stage you and your fellow thespian privately wondered whether the skit would result in a special joint sitting of both

RSB:SND

houses of parliament having to be convened at the request of the real life Chief Magistrate to seek your removal from your post. Fortunately, your Honour lived to tell the tale and take up this appointment and the skit was a hit.

When COVID-19 struck your Honour lifted morale by enlisting colleagues in the creation of light-hearted videos perhaps in the Local Court's answer to Tik Tok. One was the Pink Ribbon Challenge where craft activities had to be performed exclusively with legal tape. Many colleagues attribute making it through the last two years with their sanity intact, possibly a little bit ruffled around the edges but mostly intact, because of your Honour's riotous sense of humour. This extended to Christmas when your Honour's virtual advent calendar resulted in humorous videos being sent daily for a month. By the end of the 30 days of Christmas even your Honour would have to admit being thoroughly exhausted.

Your Honour, you've been celebrated for the genuine humanity you bring to the bench and your ability to engage with people in a way that affect meaningful change. You've been absolutely dedicated to the Children's Court jurisdiction, committed to finding a better way forward for each child that came before you. As President of the Children's Court you will bring a driving and transformative belief that the Court can help bring out the best in each young person that comes before it viewing the Court not as an instrument of punishment but as an agent of genuine rehabilitation. The solicitors of this State look forward to watching that journey unfold and I warmly congratulate you on your appointment as President of the Children's Court and, on a final note, our mutual friend, Liz, says you'll be amazing and I agree.

PRICE J: Thank you, President. Judge Skinner.

JUDGE SKINNER: We sit on level 21 of a building that lies on Gadigal land. I

RSB:SND

acknowledge the traditional owners of the land and pay my respects to elders past, present and emerging. I also acknowledge that too many Aboriginal people have been through these courts. I was recently in Moree and I met Jenny Swan from Grandmothers Against Removal New South Wales. Jen commented that we ask Aboriginal communities to welcome us to their lands which they do despite them knowing that we will lock them up and take away their children. It's confronting, isn't it? We can't change the history but we can change the future and we must. It is a commitment that all of us share.

It is such an honour to be appointed to a role where I can be part of that change. I look forward to working alongside the courageous and resilient Aboriginal community members who will educate us about the impact of colonisation on first nations people and the importance of identifying strength in family. Family is culture and culture is belonging.

Thank you, Mr Attorney, I am astonished and elated to be given this opportunity and I am chuffed that you made time to be here this morning. Thank you, Chief Judge, for your warm and compassionate welcome to this bench and thank you, President Warner, for not sharing all of Lizzie's stories. I am grateful for your time and careful words.

I opted for a ceremony to bring us together and I wanted to address my colleagues old and new about how these jobs change us. I was appointed to the Local Court when I was 33. I was too young, nervous about making all my mistakes in public and I was very, very excited. I have grown up in the judiciary. I've moved courts and moved houses. I've done my country service, twice. I've had my children and I've made life-long friends. In Court I have been challenged, complimented, abused, entertained and frightened. I have sought counsel but every decision has been my own. Some

RSB:SND

days I have made over 100 decisions, some days I have made none and some days I wished I could walk out that courtroom door and never walk back in.

It is such a privilege, a responsibility, a burden and a pleasure to spend our days on the bench serving the community. We meet people during their points of crisis and each person deserves a respectful, consistent and transparent judicial decision. I have made many mistakes in courtrooms over the years but I hope everyone who has walked into my court walked out knowing what happened and why it happened.

It's a challenging role. Community expectations are not always aligned with judicial responsibilities. The content of our work is either sad or bad and often both. What happens in our days becomes our norm and our norm becomes the world we see. We change the way we look at the world by seeing it through a lens of what we can do to improve it and by remembering the sample we see of society is so small.

In the Children's Court I've been given the freedom to explore opportunities to change the cycle of disadvantage. I stepped outside the courtroom and into the community armed with biscuits, North Shore sandwiches, some ideas and a smile and the community walked towards the Court.

I am so lucky to be here. Luck has a little to do with timing but I've read that lucky people are persistent and resilient. Resilience enables us to withstand stress and trauma and resilience is founded in the strength of our relationships. I can survive almost anything because of the people who surround me.

I can't name everyone but I will name more than I should. I am terribly impatient so I'll forgive anyone who walks out or cuts the stream. Please know

RSB:SND

that if you are receiving too many texts, emails, suggestions, requests or gifts that you are part of the scaffolding that holds me up through the days. I am grateful for the friends who checked in over the past few months and to the many people who took time to send a message about my appointment. I am also very grateful for those of you who have made the effort to be here this morning.

A wise friend advised me to limit my thanks to five people. That was impossible so I'm limiting my thanks to five categories because I am a lawyer. I'll start with my time in Newcastle.

At Broadmeadow Children's Court we developed a project where services collaborated to meet the social welfare needs of the children in our criminal list. No problem was unsolvable for Susan, Teena, Errin and Judy and the project was supported by the prosecutors and defence lawyers. We do a much better job when we do it together with respect for our different roles, priorities and boundaries. Broadmeadow is live streaming; the outstanding people in the registry and foyer know how irritating I can be with an idea and I know I would not be here without them.

Mr Attorney, thank you and your government for funding the Broadmeadow project, the extraordinary Youth Koori Court, A Place to Go and many other initiatives that don't just change the lives of young people, they inspire service providers and community members with the belief that they can actually make a difference.

The local commanders in Newcastle and Lake Macquarie gave me a platform (or soap box) from which I spoke to police about how our cultural differences might prevent us from seeing that we all want the same outcomes for these kids. Brett and Danny are now rallying the police in the west to think

RSB:SND

strategically about policing young people. Danny, thank you for your energetic support and, Brett, thank you for being you.

The best part of my Newey life was landing in a street within walking distance of two of the most amazing women I've ever known, Sare, Kenna and their families have made Dudley our home. Our friendship has been filled with lively conversation, inexplicable sporting injuries, creative ideas and stupid challenges. Their spirits sustain and delight me.

The judicial officers we become are a medley of the judicial officers we have seen and again I'm sorry I can't thank you all.

I have had an excellent role model. Judge Johnstone is a grand master in the game of chess that is life. He is astute and humane and he is always on the lookout for a mind at work. Judge Johnstone has proven that with supportive and strategic management pawns can move like queens.

Judge Dive was the senior children's magistrate when I worked for the Children's Legal Service. If there was such a thing as a perfect judicial voice that rings in my head it belongs to Judge Dive. He is an inspiration.

Thank you, Judge Henson, for seeing something in me and for presenting my name to now Judge Hatzistergos. I have benefited from your support and guidance. During the time I was in the Local Court I learned much from the irrepressible Paul Cloran, the pragmatic and direct Jane Mottley, the insightful Jane Culver, who is one of those rare women who helps other women bloom, and Chris O'Brien who still finds time to workshop issues of life or law with decency and warmth.

Turning next to the Local Court I have frequently benefited from the wisdom of my brothers, sisters, aunts and uncles on the collegial Local Court bench. Thank you all but a special thanks to Truscott, Farnan, Still, Mabbutt

RSB:SND

and the sensational Ian Guy for consistently solving problems that stumped me.

Thank you to the chicks for all you've done and all you should have told me not to do, my confidantes Karen Robinson and Caroline, my sis Staffy, Erin and Katie Kate. Thank you to Stone for checking in during points of crises and to Duncombe for holding my hand through an unsteady year. Devine has bridged the chasm between human and cyclist in my work and home. The brilliant Dave Williams often teases me about whether it hurts when the manna from heaven rains down upon me. Of course not, Dave, some of that manna is you.

Over the years Judge Henson brought my closest friends to work, Hattie's family are almost my family. It feels like her mum and dad are in my bones. She is so smart and her spider sense checks in when I need it. TOS and I have dissected many human behaviours over a block of Lindt. James has placated me, grounded me and laughed with me for 20 years. Kirra's curiosity and care mean she is forwarded the transcripts from inside my head. Caleb always reminds me of things that matter.

Some of the friends I've met through work are not in my work place. Lloyd's perspective is invaluable. He is such a good sounding board and such a good sport. Jihad is the silliest person I've ever met but this State is incredibly lucky to have his heart on the payroll. Dave Evenden is interested in everything and can be trusted with anything. Rob Munro calms me with his strong inner compass and Dan Taylor is always the fun in my pocket and I'll be proud if my children develop a tenth of his generosity. I hope you all have a friend who will fly across the world or travel ten hours at short notice just because you are worth the effort.

RSB:SND

President Warner's dream teammate, Lizzie, has the fastest and most capable brain I have ever encountered and she uses it to educate, entertain and trick me and treat me. She's in Brisbane and she was a bit dirty about the start time because she had to get to work early.

Brenna is my oldest friend and she can disarm anyone with her humour and warmth. Bren inadvertently provided me with a skill set that will be useful in this role. I've witnessed the challenge of being a young person growing up between two cultures. All young people who are fluent in peppering their parents' first language with English swear words should know they may come out the other side of adolescence as a truly beautiful person.

My family has been waiting for this part.

A children's magistrate can't help but become a lay expert in parenting and my parents gave me the one thing I wish I could promise the kids in the care jurisdiction. I have been well and truly loved. I am as capable as I think I am and the confidence I bring to this role stems from always having someone back me even when I haven't deserved it. This achievement is more a credit to my parents than to me as we treat people how we were treated and the best in me comes from the positive qualities in them. Dad made me do what I said I would do and finish every job I started. Mum made me bring sunshine to every day.

My sister, Clare, is impressive in every way and she'll be responsible for implementing strategies in the delivery of health services that will change all of our lives.

Jess is Jess, she'll laugh when I laugh, she'll cry when I cry and when I don't reciprocate she'll chip away at my heart of stone. She is whip smart, creative, generous and funny and I can't imagine a day without her. I'm looking forward

RSB:SND

to living closer so our kids benefit from the love and support of Jess and her husband, Bill.

Children tap into these networks of love and support forever. My aunts, Meg and Susan, have been such strong, wise and entertaining women as I muddle through my life. They may never shake me. During this year Meg and Uncle Chick let me stay in their luxury apartment enabling me to work with colleagues in Sydney while my family remained in Newcastle.

As I was leaving Newcastle last year I was told that the legal community were sad to see me go but I would be forgiven on the condition I left them my husband. Tim is a genuine, decent, considered, independent, intelligent, somewhat difficult man. It's not easy for him living with someone who sees the world in what can be improved and expends so much energy outside the home that she crashes and collapses into it. Tim has made the dinners, maintained the bikes, sat with scared kids through the night and he's fielded legal questions only to be interrupted when his answers go on way too long. Sorry, Newcastle, he will soon be packing and moving again to remain beside me supportive, bemused and sharing the moments that make up the childhood of the three creatures we love the most.

Like my mother did before me I think my children are magic. They are each loving, funny, clever and engaged. Sam has a remarkable information gathering brain that sees the world in possibilities and he is driving towards them at breakneck speed. Leckie is inquisitive with a mind that comes at issues sideways. Leck has a comic sense of humour and a giggle that is always on the brink of an escape. Eliza does not miss a thing. She is cuddly, kind, thoughtful and already solving problems that don't belong to her.

My role for the next five years will be to lead the Children's Court.

RSB:SND

Children's courts are courts of love. We see love in all forms, young, old, new, fragmented, fertile, destroyed, exhausted, dutiful and unrequited love.

Everyone is connected and everyone's heart can be broken. The staff, registrars and magistrates in the Children's Court have big hearts and a lot of hope. It's a difficult jurisdiction and every day takes a little skin off us. The Judicial Commission, particularly Una, provide an educational foundation to ensure we do the job properly. Rosemary, Sara and James tend to us with sensible policies and manageable workloads.

It is a crucial jurisdiction. The Children's Court makes decisions that have an impact on the workload of every other jurisdiction in the future. I hope to lead the Children's Court with vision, empathy, communication and collaboration with the aim of improving the life of every single child whose name is on a file in our court.

It is a great honour to be appointed to the bench of the District Court. I'm nervous and like many before me I fear I do not belong. There are ferociously intelligent people on these benches and I'll be asking for their help.

This position straddles two jurisdictions and I either belong to neither or I belong to both. I would choose to belong to both. These are isolated jobs.

The decisions we make are our own and they must be our own but none of us should walk out of court and be alone. Benches need diversity, we all have different personalities, different priorities, different pressures, and we run at different speeds but we are all trying our best to do justice to all who appear in our court. Let's support each other. We can't forget the seriousness of our role nor the importance of finding light in the darkness. I will look after you and I hope you will look after me and together we can look after every child who comes before our Courts, their future is in our hands.

RSB:SND

PRICE J: Thank you, Judge. The Court will now adjourn.