

PETER McCALL SPEECH to ROTARY CLUB of MELBOURNE – 18 JULY, 2018 on being awarded
HONORARY LIFE MEMBERSHIP

“President Robert, Rotary colleagues, my wife Kaye, granddaughter Ellie, dear friends Christine McGinn and City of Monash Deputy Mayor Councillor Shane McCluskey, guests:

To suggest that I am less than profoundly honoured to be standing before you today would be a wilful misapplication of the Queens English. I have thought long and hard about what I am going to say today and have decided to use but three Nouns supported by the reasons why.

The nouns are: COMMITMENT, PERCEPTION and REALITY

It was a cold miserable Sunday afternoon in 1976. I was driving an unmarked police vehicle with a colleague when we returned to our office for a warm drink and some food. I called home, spoke to Kaye who informed me that both Brett and Lisa were preparing for dinner and were watching Disneyland in front of the log fire. I advised Kaye that it was very quiet around town and I expected to be home before midnight. After a short time we returned to the car and recommenced our patrols. A radio message was received seeking an unmarked car to attend a suspected drug overdose in Collingwood. We responded and were directed to the address of a rooming house in one of the side streets close by the Commission housing estate.

We were met upon arrival by a greasy sloth of a man who directed us to the last room down the dark, dank corridor. I entered to find laying over in the corner on a large chaff bag full of straw the figure of a young female. I knelt down shining my torch away from her whilst placing my left arm under her shoulders. I told her she was safe, I was a policeman and my name was Peter. She shuddered and muttered in a laboured voice, “don’t let me die, don’t let me die.” I could hear the ambulance siren getting louder and louder and I said to her, “you won’t die sweetheart, you are now safe.” She let out another loud sigh, muttered “don’t let me die” shuddered and died in my arms.

I didn’t get home at midnight, it was well after 4:00 am with all the commensurate paperwork that need attention. I discovered the girl had left her mother when she was 13 because mum was bringing home druggies and they were turning their attention to the young one because she was fresher and cleaner than her mother. She lived on the street for two years and had resorted to using heroin daily. The veins in her arms and legs had collapsed and she was injecting regularly into her eye balls and her vagina. She was exactly the same age as our son, 15, when she died. She lives today with me as she has for the past 39 years, sitting on my shoulder.

That heartbreaking experience activated me to become strongly involved in the community.

That is COMMITMENT

On a Thursday evening in September 2000, 80 guests were enjoying the hospitality of Richard and Jeanne Pratt in their twin storied penthouse in the QUAY overlooking Circular Quay Sydney. Guests including Rupert and Lachlan Murdoch, Jack Welch CEO of GE, Premier Bob Carr and Olympic Games Minister Michael Knight joined with the King and Queen of Greece. The big draw card was the presence of the World Champion boxer Muhammad Ali who I escorted in to the drawing room to the rapturous welcome of all the guests. So many big names, world business leaders and sports

champions were jockeying for photos with Ali when I decided it was clear to take a short break. I was walking past a group when one of the men looked me in the eye and said, "I haven't met you, you must be bloody good". I stopped, turned and asked him to repeat what he had said, which he did, saying "You must be real good to be looking after the King. I've been watching you and you must be really bloody good." I looked him squarely in the eye and said in a clear voice, "I hope for your sake you never find out" smiled and walked away. His name was Jeff Fenech.

That is PERCEPTION

In my Rotary Presidential year, we started a program in conjunction with the Brotherhood of St. Laurence. We also received funding from the Lord Mayors Charitable Fund and the PACE Program was born. On a morning in late November 2007 a number of my Board members attended a Morning Tea put on by the Brotherhood to introduce the 8 young men and women who had been chosen to study for their VCAL certificate. We gathered in a cosy room with the candidates seated in the front row and yours truly standing before them. The first three candidates introduced themselves with clear voice before we arrived at the fourth young man who was slouched in his chair with his feet stuck right out in front of him and hands jammed deep in his pockets. I gave him a cheery welcome telling him my name and asking him his. He looked down and muttered "Da Mai". I said I couldn't hear that and asked him to repeat his name to which he said, "Da Mai". I said, "Da Mai" and he said "Yeah Mai". I made a bit of a joke of this charade, tapping my ear and telling the girl seated alongside this fella that I was getting old and I was having trouble hearing. I said, "Do you know this guy and what his name is". She giggled and said "his name is Doug" and I said "Ah got it, Doug Mate" looking squarely at the youth. He then mumbled "Yeah Mai".

Four months later we returned to celebrate the presentation of the First Term VCAL Certificates to the successful young students. From the gathering this handsome young man approached me with a smile from ear to ear. He said, "Mr Peter I want to thank you for helping me." I said, maybe you have me mixed up with someone else, I don't recall meeting you. He said with his face beaming "My name is Doug and you saved my life. I am now learning how to fix cars, not steal them. I'm off the streets, sleeping in my own bed and off the drugs. Look what I've got, as he proudly unrolled his newly gained Certificate. Thank you, thank you."

That is REALITY

In conclusion I mention I have been a prodigious reader of books from the time I was a little boy with my first hero's Piglet and Winnie the Poo. In one of Milne's books Piglet turns to his very best mate, Winnie and says

"The things that make me different are the things that make me".

I feel sure he was also talking to me more than 70 years ago.

I wish to acknowledge and sincerely thank my most supportive and highly efficient Hon. Secretary my dear friend Barry Murphy who allowed me the room to do what I did best when President whilst he handled the more important stuff, but most of all to the very best friend I could ever wish to have, my wife, the love of my life Kaye, for all her support over more than 55 years because without it I could not have achieved what I set out to do. Thank you sweetheart!"