

Eulogy to (Ronald) Murray Thompson

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Murray was born in Tullamore on 24 April 1944 and in his 13th year moved from Temora High School to the Yanco Agricultural High School.

At the age of 15, armed with his Intermediate Certificate, he decided he was ready to become a farmer.

Despite some opposition from his family, who recognised his intellectual capacity, he left school to join his elder brother and parents on the family farm.

He spent the next 10 years on the 3000 acre property as a farmer and grazier.

During this time he was active in the New South Wales Rural Youth Organisation where his leadership talents quickly took him to executive positions at all levels of the Organisation, from local Club through to the State Executive, culminating in his election as State President for New South Wales.

Murray was recognised as an exceptional young man in the community and in 1969 he was chosen to receive the Rural Youth Star Award. This was a highly sought after and important award — in effect a 6 month tour to study farming techniques and systems in Japan, USSR, UK, Europe, Canada and the USA.

Murray, of course, set off on this study tour with the object of becoming a better farmer.

Ironically, though, the experience opened the door on worlds beyond country New South Wales and before long was to take him off the land and into the law.

And so, at the age of 26 years, Murray made a very courageous decision — that was to go back to school and further his education there and at University.

Murray then studied law at the University of New South Wales; driving taxis, cleaning swimming pools and selling tobacco products to supplement his income.

He was awarded the degrees of Bachelor of Jurisprudence and Bachelor of Laws and entered Articles of Clerkship in Sydney with the large American law firm, Baker McKenzie.

In 1978 he was enrolled a Solicitor of New South Wales and later as a Solicitor of the High Court, Solicitor of the Federal Court of Australia and as a Notary Public. More recently he qualified as an accredited Mediator.

Murray joined Michell Sillar & Brown (as the firm then was known) in 1978.

He worked initially in the area of workers compensation and insurance claim litigation.

The then Senior Partner of the Practice, Kevin McGregor, was interested in developing a maritime law practice.

His wife, Eileen at this stage had completed her medical studies and was awarded a post-doctoral Fellowship, which was a 2 year scholarship to the UK.

And so it was that the Thompsons (now three — Murray, Eileen and 5 week old international traveller Patrick) set off to London.

London of course was the international centre of shipping law and Murray had written to scores of maritime law firms seeking a position. He was employed by Bentley Stokes and Lowless, a leading London shipping firm.

On their return to Sydney, Murray together with the late Colin Yuill as his mentor and consultant set about developing the maritime

practice at Michell Sillar. He brought in other lawyers and — really against all odds — Michell Sillar within a few years was in the top three maritime law firms.

Clients included significant organisations such as Cunard Lines, Botany Bay Shipping, Steamship Mutual P & T Association, Australian National Line and Mediterranean Shipping Company.

In addition to this area of practice Murray, from 1988, was head of the Firm's Commercial Litigation and Transport Law Department and held various management positions within the practice. He also became a specialist litigator in Commercial Law and in a rapidly developing part of the law, the litigation of Intellectual Property matters.

Murray personally has run some of the most difficult and complex cases for major Australian and multinational corporations with considerable success.

These have included highly technical patent and trade mark disputes, a range of commercial litigation matters as well, of course, as very substantial shipping matters. Clients included Johnson & Johnson, Smorgon Plastics and Janssen-Cilag. Despite all these demands on his time, Murray also managed to write and present a number of legal papers.

Murray had a great capacity for clear and logical thinking and this attribute came through strongly in his writing.

He had an early interest in writing, having been the Assistant Editor, while still at University, of the inaugural issue of the University of New South Wales Law Journal. He later became Editor of that Journal.

An important paper 'Reform of the Law of Marine Insurance' was published in the Insurance Law Journal. Other papers were presented to bodies such as the Insurance Institute of New South Wales, the Maritime Law Association of Australia and New Zealand and a variety of professional, industry and business organisations such as the Risk Managers Association, the Chamber of Commerce and the Soft Drink Manufacturers Association.

Murray held a number of positions on outside bodies. He was a Guest Lecturer to the Master of Laws courses run by the University

of Technology of Sydney, lecturing there on marine insurance and intellectual property litigation. He also was secretary of the Maritime Law Association of Australia and New Zealand and was Chairman of the Marine Discussion Group of the New South Wales Insurance Institute.

Murray enjoyed considerable success as a lawyer, achieving after a very late start what many other able lawyers could never hope to achieve in many more years of practice — years which have been denied to Murray

Murray was a highly industrious man. He was never one to be daunted by large workloads and he brought with him — perhaps from the land — a work ethic which got him started in the office each morning well before most others had arrived; as well as an unflinching willingness to do whatever work was necessary to achieve the desired results. His eye for detail and his skill in managing his affairs and those around him were the envy of many of us.

And all of this he carried out in an atmosphere of calm and good spirit.

It is little wonder then that the lawyers and staff in Murray's Department and work groups, without exception, have shown nothing but the greatest respect and affection for him.

He was never afflicted by that curse of so many lawyers — the overdeveloped ego. Murray always was able to assess any issue or problem objectively and in a reasoned way.

He never allowed personal considerations to interfere with his judgment, and was always willing to consider any rational viewpoint different from his own. He was strongly driven by a sense of fairness and reasonableness.

Murray commanded considerable respect both within his firm and equally from the Bar (the Barristers), other solicitors and clients.

This respect stemmed not only from his abilities and commitment as a lawyer, but from an underlying and fundamental attribute that for me epitomised Murray; namely, his integrity.

Integrity in the sense of honesty of purpose.

I have always known him to be quick to detect and totally reject anything, whether large or small, which might have in it the seeds of duplicity or deception.

In 10 years of working closely with Murray, virtually on a daily basis, I have never seen him tolerate anything but a total commitment to fairness and truth.

Integrity in the sense of a willingness to be frank and candid under even the most difficult circumstances.

Integrity in the sense of strength and constancy; because Murray could always be relied on to get the job done, to take on burdens that others around him might shirk, and to provide support and assistance to those of us who might have been in need.

And that kind of integrity, of course, is not possible without courage.

Those who have been close to Murray, especially in the past trying years, have learned what considerable courage lay behind Murray's calm exterior.

Just as Murray has handled other adversities, so did he face his illness.

Uncomplaining and undemanding, he allowed neither pain nor fear of what he knew lay ahead to overwhelm him.

Because of Murray's cheerful manner and positive commitment to continue as normal for as long as possible, many of his clients and colleagues were simply not aware of the battle he was fighting.

And those few of us who had just a little insight, could only shake our heads in sheer admiration and respect for our friend and colleague.

And so we join with his wife Eileen and son Patrick and with Murray's brothers and sisters and other family in mourning our mutual loss.

But we do that knowing we can also celebrate the fact that we had the privilege of sharing the limited time which was given for Murray to be here with us — for Murray was truly a good man.