

**TRIBUTE DELIVERED AT THE STATE FUNERAL OF
THE RIGHT HONOURABLE SIR ZELMAN COWEN PC
AK GCMG GCVO KStJ Kt**

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**AT TEMPLE BETH ISRAEL, MELBOURNE ON 13TH
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Six years ago, in one of my saddest conversations with him, Sir Zelman asked me to give this speech on this day. I discharge my duty to him today with a very heavy heart.

He asked me to speak of him as the private man.

My best friend at school was Nick Cowen, the bright second son of the Cowen family. Long ago, he invited me to Shabbat dinner with his parents in the Vice Chancellors residence in Brisbane. My fear of saying anything silly in the presence of such awesomeness left me silent, until the warmth and inclusiveness of Professor and Mrs Cowen freed my voice.

My father passed away when I was 16, and for reasons best known to Professor Cowen, he tucked me under his gentle wing and guided me through the difficult years.

I extend my heartfelt thanks to Anna and the family for so graciously permitting me to stay tucked under Zelman's wing for the last 40 years. It was the best place a boy in my circumstances could have ever been, and for that I am truly grateful.

Of the many ingredients that go into shaping such a remarkable man, it is clear that two women played roles

above all others. I pay tribute to his formidable mother Sarah and of course, to his beloved wife, the incomparable Anna.

As a boy, Sir Zelman's mother recognized his extraordinary gifts and her ambitions for him were boundless.

Even today, family folklore suggests that she would not be surprised, but would be very pleased by how far he went.

For Zelman however, the great source of satisfaction was in undertaking service for others, and he did this with the caring and loving support of Anna.

Anna and Zelman shared a love story and a marriage as strong, committed and complementary as any of us has ever seen. For 66 years, it was the perfect union, and an example to all who knew them.

The reality is that he could neither have achieved so much nor experienced the level of satisfaction with his life without her, and he knew it and told us so. She was his equal partner.

The irreverence of the Cowen children was a joy for Sir Zelman to behold. He loved each of his children Simon, Nick, Kate and Ben deeply. He loved to tell the stories of their brilliance in disagreeing with him or their apparent indifference to the great affairs of state in which he was preoccupied for much of his time.

Of his legendary intellectual achievements, perhaps the one which gave Professor Cowen greatest cause for anxiety was the ordeal of whether he would be adjudged worthy by Oxford's most eminent professors. The Doctorate of Civil Law is a very rare degree. Its few recipients enter the Pantheon of great professors. It is awarded following an examination of whether the candidate's published books and papers constitute 'an

original contribution to knowledge of such substance and distinction as to give the candidate authoritative status in some branch of legal learning.'

Among lawyers, this is Oxford University's PhD of PhDs. It was conferred on Professor Cowen in 1968 after what he described as months and months of anxious waiting.

When he told the family the good news, the teenage Simon's response was: 'Big deal.'

In his old age, as Simon observed, Zelman found the time, and a greater insight into their worlds, as he patiently listened to their voices and more fully appreciated who they had become along the way. This gave him great pleasure, and meaning. He considered himself blessed, to be surrounded by a large, talented and extraordinarily loving family.

The Cowen home, managed by Anna, placed Zelman at its epicentre. In the Jewish tradition of conviviality and sharing, all were welcome to break bread.

We conversed at a round table, where everyone was equal.

It was lively, stimulating, intoxicating and infectious.

Everyone was afforded, nay, encouraged to express and of course, defend their views. His examination was always, as Don has mentioned, in the great tradition, Socratic in nature. Dialogue, interspersed with wit, humour and stories was always the order of the day. No one was humbled or humiliated in an argument with the great professor. They were treated kindly. With him, no one ever left a conversation in doubt that they had learned something.

In so many of my youthful discussions with him, Professor Cowen was quietly teaching me how to think for myself.

The Cowen homes (for there were at least 11 by my count) were forever filled with people with whom they could share mutual affection and admiration. Humour, debate and ideas always provided a sense of connectedness in this family.

There was great normalcy in Professor Cowen home.

Like all of us, Sir Zelman needed a private place to restore the energies of the public man.

One of his favourite homes was the Cowens' modest holiday cottage at Caloundra on the coast north of Brisbane. For years, this was his safe haven. He retreated there after periods of great intensity in his work.

The cottage was where he spent much treasured family time. Even when he became Governor-General holidays were spent there - reading, talking, cooking together, playing games and strolling on Dickey Beach and much to the consternation of the security services, swimming daily in the surf.

The greatest cricketing moment in the life of one of our friends was achieved the day he was dismissed 'caught aide-de-camp, bowled Governor-General.'

Sir Zelman said that he was stirred and elevated by great architecture. He said it was among the greatest of human achievements, expressing the ascent of man. Though some might not regard the cottage as great architecture, for Zelman, his humble cottage created the environment for the expression of the humanistic values of the private man.

He liked the person he became when he got there.

Sir Zelman was mentor to many. He chose them all. They range in age from in their eighties to a young man, still a teenager, at Oxford today.

The old ones became outstanding contributors to their society.

The younger ones, like me, are still working at it.

His face would light up in a discussion about how one of his chosen was going. He cared deeply about them and was comforted by the fact that they cared so much about him.

Some have flown from England to be here today. When they heard the news, they dropped their tools of trade, left their university and barristers chambers, went to Heathrow and emerged at Tullamarine, because the Old Man was gone, and they had to be here to say good bye.

Zelman was a great teacher. He taught us all to think and also how to think. He had a remarkable gift in nourishing others. He also taught us that with the privilege of learning from him, it is our responsibility to pass it on.

Much of what we learned from Sir Zelman was by osmosis. Simply by being in his presence and discussing the great affairs of the day, or the intricacies and subtleties of the law, we learned.

To understand how the private man achieved this, we should remember his authenticity. He was an exemplar of decency, unfailing courtesy, generosity, openness to reason, grace and constancy. He afforded everyone their dignity.

His life's work, in public and in private, reflected the deepest concern for the dignity of every person.

His views were always clearly articulated, balanced and ethical. Though he understood logic, and could dissect propositions of great subtlety, his solutions were a synthesis of principle, experience and the workable. His touchstones were justice, sense and order.

In short, he was wise.

He embedded in us a love of learning, the pursuit of ideas and the power of reason in achieving justice, simply by being who he was.

It is important to emphasise that he did not shape us – he helped us to shape ourselves. In discussion with him, when he sensed that we finally understood or had absorbed something, he would smile and say, ever so ambiguously: 'So there we have it.' This was Sir Zelman's distinctive method of closure.

All mentors have protégés, but in hubris many never let them go or grow.

Sir Zelman had the special gift of knowing how to make that subtle and imperceptible transition from teacher to friend.

Friendship was very important to Sir Zelman. He knew so many, and as has been recounted earlier, met many of the most famous, important and compelling figures of the last 80 years. His private world knew an extraordinary range of friends from all walks of life and all parts of the world.

He ached privately for the loss of Peter Netti, Sam Cohen, Robin Boyd, Peter Carter, Paul Freadman and Bob Lewy. All were men about whom he fondly and often recounted experiences, occasionally, especially as he grew older, with a tear in his eye.

I know Sir Zelman had an especial fondness for his driver of many years, Steve Smith and his two personal assistants, Lyn Curtis and Honorena Sihin.

Zelman stayed close to the communities to which he belonged. He cared deeply about the Jewish Community. In his public life he became the successor to General Sir John Monash and Sir Isaac Isaacs as men who transcended politics and religious affiliation to play vital roles in the affairs of the nation by sheer force of their ability and personal qualities.

In his retirement, Sir Zelman was a source of support for an extraordinary number of community causes including in medical research, music, education, the performing arts, the Jewish Museum, and participated in a large number of Jewish community causes.

The St Kilda Football Club was also a source of the full range of mixed emotions for him. There is a lovely story which says much about the man, his wit and his insight.

In 2010, his long suffering St Kilda made the AFL grand final. Zelman was talking with a close colleague about the famous 1966 Grand Final where the Saints won by a single point. His friend asked Zelman whether the 1966 final fell on Yom Kippur. After Zelman confirmed that indeed it had, his friend asked whether Zelman attended the match. Smiling, the Old Man said that in the morning, he went to synagogue, and in the afternoon, after careful consideration, he went to the match. As you know, the Saints won by a single point, late in the game. So friend said "So, it was worth it, wasn't it?" Zelman replied "It's too soon to tell".

I suppose Zelman now knows the answer to the question.

In the last few years, without him expressly articulating it, I sensed that Sir Zelman's wisdom was drawing to its

peak. This was also reflected in Simon's words. Sir Zelman's wisdom was never of a kind that was imposed. You gained a sense of its solidity and worldliness in the same way you might feel gazing upon an old oak tree. You knew its foundations were so solid, that it had absorbed the deep wells of history and was going to stand the test of time. There was a quality of immutability and permanence in the expressions of the Old Man, as though he had seen and thought about it all before and therefore knew what was right, and just and good.

As his life drew to its close, he was the way he always was. Though he knew the end was nigh there was not an ounce of self pity. Uncomplaining and brave, there was total dignity and engagement, taking pleasure from the presence and stories of his large and loving family and close friends.

He enquired about the news. He made sure we would look after Anna. To understand Sir Zelman Cowen is to understand that the public man and the private man were the same: humane, decent, civil, loyal and committed to helping.

When I saw him last week, for the last time, he was spirited, clever as always, and displaying his wonderful sense of humour and wit. He was a man whose nature and temperament in the face of final decline were constant and truly magnificent.

Because he asked me to speak to you today about the private Zelman Cowen, I think it appropriate to hear from the most private sanctuary, the mind of the man himself. He once wrote

"I reflect on a life that has been blessed by good fortune...I have had remarkable opportunities to serve the communities to which I belong and about

which I care deeply. In doing so, I have had the strong support of my wife..."

Perhaps more poignantly, and with the air of inevitable finality, he said:

"The small boy did not dream all of this; it was far beyond the scope of any dream. It was what happened, and I am deeply grateful."

So there we have it.