

Swearing in Speech: 27th of November, 2002

By: Paul Kowarsky

Your honours, your worships, Mr. Attorney, counsel, my dear family and friends, ladies and gentlemen

Gratitude and elation are my deepest feelings on this momentous occasion in my life. My appointment to the Justice of the Peace Bench of the Ontario Court of Justice is truly an honour and a privilege.

I once read of the advice given by a dying father to his son: "Dream big dreams. Small dreams have no magic." Today, in this historic building, my swearing-in as a Justice of the Peace, is truly the actualisation of a dream, one that I did not even dare to dream.

I was born in South Africa where discrimination based on race and skin colour was the order of the day. I grew up assuming that this was the way of the world. But maturity transformed complacency into repugnance, and I adjusted my thoughts and behaviour accordingly. But, open opposition to the government was dangerous, and often threatened, and even cost the opponents their lives.

Those of us who fled the abhorrent apartheid regime of that beautiful country proceeded to protest the plight of the non-white populous from afar. When I left South Africa, I knew that my practice as a lawyer would have to be put on hold.

My wife, Barbara, and I have just returned from a trip to South Africa, the first time I had been back since I brought my family to Canada in 1976. A lot has changed for the better, but there is still much to be done there.

I am a fervent believer in making things happen. Open the door, even before opportunity knocks. Perchance, it won't. Nothing stands in the path of one's will. Go for it, and you'll get it. Wait for it, and it may never come.

With great pride and anticipation, I now return to the justice system. My heartfelt gratitude goes to all those who encouraged and supported my endeavour. I pledge always to strive to meet the tremendous challenges of the responsibility and authority entrusted to me.

I am fully aware of how important it is for presiding judicial officers to weigh their words very carefully, so as to avoid making these kinds of faux pas, which I often heard during announcements from the pulpit:

"Don't let worry kill you; let the clergy help."

"Wednesday the ladies liturgy society will meet. Miss Jones will sing: 'Put me in my little bed' accompanied by the minister."

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“Thursday there will be a meeting of ‘The Young Mother's Club.’ All wishing to become young mothers, please see the Rev. Cole in his study.”

Impartiality and fairness, honesty, sensitivity, and yes, a tinge of humility as well: these are the noble cornerstones of the judiciary. They are the principles which must guide us through the vast complexities of our judicial process.

The jurisdiction of a Justice of the Peace in Ontario is varied, broad and extensive, and the effects of our decisions are far-reaching in their ramifications. Cautious contemplation is always required, I believe, as well as an abiding adherence to the evolutionary legal system. Keeping up with the law and its daily development is a major commitment which we must make.

Sir Thomas Talfound once said: “Fill the seats of justice with good people, but not so absolute in goodness as to forget what human frailty is.”

I congratulate my colleagues on their swearing-in today.

May we conduct ourselves in such a manner as to bring dignity, honour and respect to our entire bench. By so doing, we will ensure that the lofty standards of the judiciary will continue to be held in the highest esteem by all the people of our land.

Thank you.