

Speech for RC Humanitarian Award

Steven Castan

First of all on behalf of Nellie, Melissa, Lindy Myself and the whole Castan family we are very proud to have dads name attached to this great organization Stand Up and to this award and wish to congratulate the recipients:

Genevieve Radnan for setting up [Grandma Jenny's Training Centre](#) in Kenya. And Dr Hilton Immerman for his work in setting up the [Shalaom Gamarada](#) program

Thanks also to Paul Rubenstein and ABL for hosting this event. Paul and our family go back a long long way, indeed we were all at Monash university law school together with my sisters Lindy and Melissa back in the day. I cant believe its more than 20 years ago!

I'd also like to acknowledge that my dad and Mark leibler had a deep and enduring friendship and mutual collegial respect with collaborative values and approaches to indigenous rights and pro-bono in general, this endures today through the firms ethos and in particular the incredible work done by Peter Seidel with the firms full support.

Both Genevieve and Dr Hilton are inspiring, humble, generous and gracious Jewish Australians actively pursuing social justice for all in Australia and overseas and thoroughly deserve their awards tonight. Through their actions they are standing up for those who cant in the community, and this is also what my dad stood for.

Dad taught us a lot of things through his actions and words. We grew up watching him be involved with many social causes from aboriginal land rights, to challenging anti-Semitism or racism in the press, to taking the government to task on issues

such as the right to protest against duck shooters, & police powers to fingerprint and arrest arbitrarily, to working along side the federal government to stop potential environmental disasters such as the Franklin Dam.

We didn't really question why dad was so involved in these matters; we just assumed that's what you do, if you can. If you have skills. If you are blessed with the time, the resources and intelligence, you just do it. There was a lot of discussion around the kitchen table as you would expect and two main themes have emerged that I have thought about a lot over the years which I believe drove my dad. These themes I think match up very well with Stand Ups philosophy of a Jewish organization standing up and taking responsibility for social justice outwardly in Australia and beyond.

Firstly, dad's Jewish values and his understanding of what it is to be a minority, an oppressed people, who were to be destroyed but had survived the horrors of the holocaust drove his desire to right the wrongs as much as he could that had been wreaked upon the indigenous people of Australia – dad explained it himself in a speech in 1998:

“What was the meaning of my determination to do my part never to permit a future destruction of the Jewish people, if I just stood by and participated in the bounty and opportunity of the Australia nation? What would that mean without doing something to expose and expunge the legal lie which lay at the foundation of the dispossession, disempowerment and attempted destruction of an oppressed group of fellow Australians?”

The idea that as Jews who have survived and thrived in Australia, we especially cannot stand by and watch the effective genocide of the aboriginal people and their culture

really drove dad to take on cases like Mabo and Wik, and spur the nation to not shirk away from these issues.

Secondly, dad used to say (a lot in fact) ...try to “walk softly and carry a big stick” – I used to interpret this only as meaning do good deeds because its right, not because you want recognition or glory – dad never made a big deal of what he – he wasn’t one for pushing himself above the issue he was fighting for - but I think its deeper than that, I think he was also saying do what you can with the skills and intelligence and resources YOU have and do it gracefully, within societys bounds – like the recipients tonight – he pursued change utilizing his legal skills, his always questioning mind and a belief that change was necessary and can come from within the law not outside of it

Then again, I also learned you also have to be flexible and realistic and adapt as is necessary as well...sometimes he told me to walk loudly and carry a big stick !! For example, when he told me to stand up to the racist boys at school in year seven who were taunting Asians, Greeks and Jews by punching first (as soon as they made the next racist taunt) but then according to dads very firm instruction reporting myself to the headmaster straightway to take my punishment for fighting – strangely I wasn’t the one suspended – but the issue of racism was tackled by the school and discussed widely and it never happened again...

Sometimes I guess you got to bend your own rules a bit and take direct action when its needed. But if you think about it, he told me to report myself to the headmaster...a form of walking softly after utilizing the big stick!

So these themes that I learned from my dad through his actions have resonated within me and our family inter generationally –

take on the important issues, if you can, help people less fortunate than you with the skills you have and within the bounds of society – not just in relation to indigenous issues, but issues of injustice everywhere, from refugees and asylum seekers, to family violence and the environment.

I believe these values continue to resonate through the Jewish community through organizations such as Stand Up and the generosity of law firms such as Arnold Bloch Leibler and of course through this award and its recipients.

Jewish Australians need to stand up for those who can't stand up for themselves. We are privileged in many ways and have the wisdom from experience to know how important it is to stand up for human rights. So it is fitting indeed that this award go to tonight's recipients who both embody the characteristics of Ron Castan and who have achieved excellence in their chosen humanitarian fields – congratulations again to both of them.

We are honored to be associated with them and hope they continue to walk softly carrying that big stick of hope and change!

Thank you Gary and Lillian very much for having us here and thanks to everyone for supporting this event