

## I.I.U.M. LAWGRADS 2004 DINNER

9 March 2004

(Cyberview Lodge Resort, Cyberjaya)

When I received the invitation to this dinner, I accepted it without thinking much about it. It is just another dinner with graduating students from IIUM. But, when I was told that I would have to make a speech, I started to think: What am I going to say without repeating at least some of what I had said last year? Then it crossed my mind. What's the problem? I will be speaking to a different audience after all. Those graduating students who were at last year's dinner would not be here this year. Those who are here this year were not at last year's dinner. If there are a few who were at last year's dinner and are also here again this year (I believe there is none), then, just as they had listened to the same lectures twice and sat for the same examination twice, perhaps they should listen to my speech twice too!

As far as the professors and lecturers are concerned, I don't think I have to worry as they do the same thing year after year.

Then, I remembered an incident involving Lord Denning and Lord Diplock. In late 1970's, the Law Lords from England, including Lord Denning and Lord Diplock visited Malaysia. During the visit, Lord Denning delivered a public lecture at the University of Malaya. Lord Denning first introduced himself as "Tuan Roti", being the Bahasa Malaysia translation of "Master of the Rolls" given to him by the then President of Sessions Court, Kuala Lumpur who was assigned as his protocol officer. Then Lord Denning spoke about the misconception people had regarding the post of "Master of the Rolls". Taking out a piece of paper from his coat pocket, he read it. It was a letter from an Indian gentleman who had just graduated as an engineer from a British University. The letter concluded something like this: "I hope you will consider me for a suitable post in your company". Obviously, the gentleman must have thought that "Master of the Rolls" was the Chief Executive of the Rolls Royce company! Of course we had a good laugh. But, when the laughter died down, Lord Diplock who was sitting beside Tun Suffian whispered to Tun Suffian that Lord Denning had been telling the same joke for the past twenty years and had been carrying the same letter wherever he went.

So, I have a precedent to follow, no less than that of Lord Denning's.

Ladies and gentlemen,

You have just completed one phase of your life and are embarking on to another phase which I call "the real life." You will find it very different from your student life. You will find, among other things, that things you never thought were important, are important. You will find that, at times, you will have to be pragmatic rather than idealistic. You will find that, most of the time, you do not have the right to choose your boss but you will have to put up with him. You will find that knowing the law is not enough if you do not have the clients. You will find that, most of the time, you will be dealing with people, all kinds of people, rather than the law. You may feel that you in a strange surrounding. But, soon, pretty soon, without even realizing it, you will find that you have adjusted yourselves and are quite comfortable where you are. Call that the "survival instinct", if you like. In fact you have done that many times, for example, when you first went to school and when you entered the university.

One of the first things you will learn when you start working is that you will know how much you don't know. I'll tell you about my personal experience. I reported for duty at the Attorney General's Chambers on 2<sup>nd</sup> May 1969. Before I could learn anything May 13 incident broke out. I took the first available flight home. One week later I received a posting order. I was to become a Magistrate in Kangar, Perils. On 1<sup>st</sup>. June 1969, I went to Kangar. On my arrival at the court house, I was told that I had to sit in Jitra on that day. I went to Jitra. When I arrived, I saw a huge crowd waiting for me. The Tamil interpreter came into my chambers with a bundle of charge sheets and files, the cases fixed for the day. What was I to do? I had never seen charge sheets before. Of course he advised me what to do: just mention the cases and postpone the cases fixed for hearing. I did just that, of course with him standing close to the bench and whispering to me what to say and how much fine to impose. It was a relief when it was over. I can tell you that during my first week on the bench, I felt as if I was in a boat that was drifting at sea. But, pretty soon, I found that I was in command and the boat was no longer drifting.

So, don't worry. You will learn, provided you are willing and prepared to learn, from anybody, including your office boy. But, what is dangerous is to be "ignorantly confident". In legal practice, no matter how long you have been at the job, whether as an advocate and solicitor, a legal adviser, a prosecutor or a judge, you will always come across things that you don't know. It is a continuous learning process.

In working life, there are times when you are required to do something by a certain dateline that you think is impossible to do. Under such circumstance, you have no choice but to somehow do it. Often, it will be done. Once, when I was a Deputy Registrar, at about 9.00 a.m. I was called by His Royal Highness Raja Azlan Shah, then Chief Justice, Malaya. He wanted me to draft a speech for him and he wanted it by 12.00 noon the same day. I asked him whether he could give me until 4.00 p.m. because I had about 20 chamber matters fixed before me that

morning. He replied: "If you have no time, make time". Somehow I did it and he was very pleased with the speech. Of course, I got more "assignments" after that.

One advice that Allah Yarham Tun Suffian gave me which I try my best to follow until today is this. He said: "If you have a choice between a bombastic word and a simple word, choose the simple word. If you have a choice between a long sentence and a short sentence, choose the short sentence. If you have some doubts, delete. No matter how long or how well you write, if people cannot understand you, it serves no purpose."

If you decide to practise, after you are called to the bar, I suggest that you work as an assistant in an established firm first and get some experience before you go on your own. There is too much risk if you start on your own without any experience in practice. Furthermore, do not be too easily tempted to accept an offer of partnership, especially by one-man firm unless you know that the firm's accounts are in order. As Chairman of the Disciplinary Board, I came across cases where, on admission to the bar, those fresh Bumiputra lawyers were offered partnerships by one-man firms. Of course they were happy to accept the offers. So, they became partners. But, except for the name, the firm continued to be run by the existing lawyer. Finance was handled by the "senior partner". The "junior partner" had no say at all in the running of the firm. Since the accounts were not properly kept, they could not produce audited accounts at the end of the year. As a result, the innocent new partner could not renew his practising certificate. If money is missing from the clients' accounts, as a partner, he is liable too.

Let me not worry you all too much on this happy occasion. Challenges and problems there will be in whatever you do. Face them as they come. Be honest, but not naïve and work hard. There is no short cut to success. From my experience, I can say with confidence that, in the long run, it pays to be honest and to work hard.

Don't try to get rich quickly. The legal profession is not the right profession for that. I remember a lawyer who, on the day he was admitted to the bar, boasted that he would be a millionaire in two years. Well, I don't know whether he did become a millionaire in two years but I know that he was suspended in about two years.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I thank you all very much for inviting me to this dinner. I wish you all success in whatever career you choose.

Thank you.