

**NEL**

**90<sup>th</sup> Birthday Lunch**

**Welcome Speech**

**16 May, 2010**

Ladies and Gentlemen:

You've all been invited here today under cover of Noel's being 90 and not out. But not out of what? Surely the invitation hasn't led you here under the misapprehension that Noel's scoring runs in cricket: his legs have rendered that an impossibility. I think the answer's to be found in the cryptic NELs in the corners of the invitation. Some of you might have thought that was meant to be his monogram for Noel Emanuel Lasker. I think that it might be meant to stand for "Not Exactly Living". When I phoned him up on his birthday, he told me that his legs are about 110 years old. But, I think, his mind seems to be only about seventy. So it all averages out to 90 (which I gather would still be a good average for him in cricket). So we've come here today to celebrate the fact that Noel's average is 90 and he's not out of life, even if he's Not Exactly Living in the way that he once was, and would still like to be.

I should like to welcome you here, on behalf of Louise, Louella, and Stephen's families, to celebrate this happy occasion with Noel and Janice. We extend a special welcome to Dolly Cohen, who has not only travelled further than anyone else to be here, but has known Noel longer than anyone else here. We are also glad to have with us David and Joyce Young, who have travelled down from Lake Macquarie. It's pleasing that a few people who worked at Corrugated Paper all those years ago are here. Unfortunately, Valerie and Wayne Mills, who now live in Tasmania, have had to send their apologies, as, despite their best endeavours, they have been prevented from joining us due to ill health.

This has been a rather good few years for our family. In the last two years, our in-house marriage celebrant, Richard Goldman, has celebrated as many weddings for us, and, only this week, we learnt that there is to be another: Ruth's granddaughter, Georgina, has become engaged to Joshua Edmonds. In between the wedding and engagement announcements, in the last year, two of Noel's granddaughters have turned 30, one of his daughters has turned 60, and now he's 90. You might think that the pattern suggests the next will be a 120<sup>th</sup>. However, we're moving in the opposite direction, now, and going back to zero: Elliott's wife, Liliam, is due to give birth in September, so Noel's fourth generation will also be spaced thirty years apart, as the previous three have been.

Speaking of the fourth generation, his great-grandchildren – Callan, Finlay, and Eloise – have been one of the redeeming pleasures of old age for Noel. And, as many of you will know, another of the redeeming pleasures of old age for Noel and Janice has been cruising the oceans together for weeks and months on end. Unfortunately, they had to cancel a cruise earlier this year, and it hasn't proven feasible to get all of you onto a vessel today. However, we've done the next best thing. You've got the view of the harbour outside on the starboard side of the cabin, and we have recreated something of his cruising lifestyle on deck between the islands inside. Now, I know about as much about cruising as I know about cricket. However, I gather from Janice that one of the appealing features is the buffet luncheon on offer each day. And we're able to offer you that as well. In a few minutes, we'll invite you, table by table, to proceed to the buffet and help yourself to some refreshments. In the meantime, please enjoy this party. As Michael Cunningham wrote at the end of his novel, *The Hours*:

It is, in fact, a party, after all. It is a party for the not-yet-dead; for the relatively undamaged; for those who for mysterious reasons have the fortune to be alive.

It is, in fact, great good fortune.

And, as I think NEL will tell you, even if he feels that his legs are Not Exactly Living, it is, in fact, great good fortune to be 90 and not out.

Thank you.