

I Have A Dream

Rewritten for the Australian context

Bob Jackson* May 2004

Based on a speech delivered on the steps at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington D.C. on August 28, 1963 by Martin Luther King Jr. Source: Martin Luther King, Jr: The Peaceful Warrior, Pocket Books, NY 1968

Almost a score of years ago, a great but nearly forgotten man stood in Canberra to bring in a landmark piece of legislation. His name was Senator Don Grimes and the legislation was the Disability Services Act of 1986. This momentous legislation came as a great beacon light of hope to thousands of Australian families who had been seared in the flames of withering injustice. It came as a joyous daybreak, a new direction, to end the long night of captivity and exclusion. But now almost two decades later, we must face the tragic fact that many are still not free. Many do not belong.

The life of those impaired in body or mind is still sadly crippled by the manacles of segregation and the chains of discrimination. Decades later, the person with an impairment lives on a lonely island of poverty in the midst of a vast ocean of material prosperity. Decades later, the person with an impairment is still languishing in the corners of Australian society and finds himself an exile in his own land.

When parliament passed the magnificent words and ideals of the Disability Services Act with broad support, they were signing a promissory note to which every Australian was to fall heir. They signed a second note in 1992 with the Disability Discrimination Act. However, many have found that when they tried to cash the cheque of an ordinary life, it was returned marked "insufficient funds". But we refuse to believe that the bank of justice is bankrupt. We refuse to believe that there are

insufficient funds in the great vaults of opportunity of this nation.

Many will say that so much has progressed: "will you never be satisfied"? To them we say that this is no time to engage in the luxury of 'consolidation' or to take the tranquillising drug of gradualism. We can never be satisfied as long as people, heavy with the fatigue of rejection, cannot gain inclusion in the habitats

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and workplaces of the ordinary citizen and the hearts of fellow humans. We cannot be satisfied as long as the person with a disability's basic mobility is from a large institution to a smaller one. We can never be satisfied as long as a child cannot go to his local school as a fully included member, and while there is still a family that has given up hope of access to an

ordinary life for their child. No, no, we are not satisfied, and we will not be satisfied until justice rolls down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream.

Some of you have come fresh from daily rejection and denial. Many have come from areas where your quest for justice left you battered by the storms of persecution and staggered by the winds of unfeeling bureaucracy. But let us not distrust all people in power, for many of our sisters and brothers, as evidenced by their standing with us, have come to realise that their destiny is tied up with our destiny and their freedom is inextricably bound to our freedom.

Also let us not wallow in the valley of despair nor seek to slake our thirst for justice by drinking from the cup of bitterness and hatred. Let us not satisfy our hunger for inclusion by excluding those who do not share our ideals and vision. Again and again we must rise to the majestic heights of meeting bureaucratic force and twisted language with soul force and plain speaking. I say to you today, that in spite of the difficulties and frustrations of the moment, I still have a dream. It is a dream deeply rooted in the Australian dream.

I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: "We hold this truth to be self-evident: that all people deserve to be treated fairly." I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Mt Isa people with disabilities and their former keepers will be able to sit down together at a table of brotherhood. I have a dream that one day all the states of the nation, even those most sweltering with the heat of injustice and segregation, will be transformed into an oasis of justice and inclusion. I have a dream that my children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the form of their body or mind but by the content of their character. I have a dream today.

I have a dream that one day the states of Australia, whose many policies are presently dripping with the words of interposition and nullification, will be transformed into a situation where little boys and girls will be able to join hands with other little boys and girls of different races, religions, colours and impairments, and walk together as sisters and brothers. I have a dream today.

I have a faith that we will be able to transform the jangling discriminations of our nation into

a beautiful symphony of brotherhood. With this faith we will be able to work together, to pray together, to struggle together, to stand up for justice together, to belong together, knowing that one day, all people will be free and included.

This will be the day when all of God's children will be able to sing with a new meaning, "Land where my forebears died, land of Aboriginal pride, from every mountainside, let justice ring." And if Australia is to be a great nation, this must become true. So let justice ring from the hilltops of Tasmania. Let inclusion ring from the mountains of NSW. Let acceptance ring from the plains of South and Western Australia. Let belonging ring from the snow-capped mountains of Victoria! Let truth ring from the territories! Let freedom ring from the institutions of the land! But not

only that; let freedom ring from the stone heart of bureaucracy! Let inclusion ring from every school in the land! Let belonging ring from every university and place of education. From every aspect and corner of our land, let justice ring. Most of all, from our own hearts, let brotherhood ring!

When we let justice ring, when we let it ring from every town and every region, from every state and every city, we will be able to speed up that day when all of God's children, black and white, men and women, Jews and Gentiles, Christians and Moslems, impaired and whole, will be able to join hands and sing the words of unity, "We belong at last! We are one at last! Thank God Almighty, we are one at last!"

Perth
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