In early February 1991, a citizens’ dinner was held in the Parliament of New South Wales in my honour. It was crowded and there were probably 350 people present from each of my four careers.

Mr President of the Legislative Council, Your Honours, Knights of the Realm, Ministers of the Crown and former Ministers, Parliamentary Colleagues, Former Parliamentary Colleagues, Mr Secretary of the Department of Defence, Auditor-General, Learned Professors, Medical Colleagues, Baume Irregulars, Liberal Colleagues, Family, Friends—

The many doctors here know the phrase ‘angor animi’¹ (which means a sense of impending doom) and everyone here will know that, at times like that, your life is said to pass before your eyes in seconds. So tonight much of my life passes before my eyes. There are so many friends here, from so many occupations, and so many who have been there in hard times, and so many who have travelled long distances to be here. Much of what is best in public life in Australia is assembled here tonight. That is the greatest compliment—for it is a compliment just to be associated with people like you. There are so many good friends not included. But how else could we have proceeded with the absolute limit on numbers here? Through Kevin Connolly thanks go to all the staff here and to the organisers of this occasion. They were [Philip] Ruddock, [Chris] Puplick, [Jim] Carlton, [Ron] Phillips, [Robyn] Young and [Ken] Wiener. Thank you, Mr President [Kerry Sibraa], for lending your presence to this function.

The groups here represent each significant phase of my life. There is family—wife, mothers, siblings, children, clan members and a godson. There are representatives here from school, from medical teaching, from the world

of medical practice, from the Liberal Party, from the Baume Irregulars, from Parliament. There are representatives here from all sides, from the community, from the Jewish community, from academia, and there are many other dear personal and old friends. I would not want it otherwise for each group stands for some significant pleasures and times past, or, hopefully, some new occupation and activity still ahead. For each phase of my life has meant new learning and new understanding.

It would not have been possible to be in Parliament for almost 17 years without the support of a wonderful extended family. [My wife] Jenny says, and I agree, that the support and encouragement of our children, our siblings, our mothers, all our family, have made much of my time in public life possible. I thank them. The best and most fearsome drawing of a whip was that done for me by Ian Baume in 1979.

Let me look back on my time in medicine. An honourable profession. It was a good basis for public life. There are classmates from the Golden Year, and some of our teachers, here tonight. There were so many past colleagues with whom I have fought the forces of darkness—Lindsay Thompson will remember our joust with Bruce Shepherd in Canberra a few years ago. There are honourable people like Godfrey Douglas, who suffered so much in the AMA [Australian Medical Association] for being decent.

Let me look back at political life. There were [Sir John] Carrick and [Ian] Macphee and so many others. In the Liberal Party Room in 1974, party colleagues included John Gorton, Don Chipp, Bill Snedden, Neville Bonner, Ian Macphee and Bob Ellicott. All of us are now gone from that party room—to the pleasure of some of a new and harsher breed. [Paul] McLean, [Ted] Pickering, Lindley and I were all officers in the same reserve regiment at the same time and Max Willis was later commanding officer of the same regiment.

Fred Chaney and I did so many things together. I followed him in several positions and we shared some battles together in years past—Aboriginal land rights, for example.

During time of success, I was superbly served. Many staff have already been mentioned by name. Lady Violet Braddon once wrote to me and warned me not to employ Puplick—she was wrong there. There are also some superb officers, many of whom have written personally. But it is a real pleasure tonight to see Tony Ayers, John Taylor and Kevin Martin. Ayers will remember a Christmas Day when Aboriginals demonstrated at Nareen and Bill Gray will remember one late evening call by me answered by his wife, Dawn, who said, ‘It must be the dunny man’.
It is instructive to look back on my time as an academic—first in Sydney, then in the UK and the USA, later at Cumberland CAE and the ANU. Now there is a chance to go to UNSW as a teacher to work with colleagues like Ian Webster and Fred Ehrlich. I must mention my patron, Doug Piper, and a genius—a quiet genius—named Wilson Corlis.

At the last Queen Elizabeth National Capital Seminar in Canberra, 100 wonderful year 11 students discussed their future and their wish to be involved in decisions about their future. Their passionate concern raises for us all the question, ‘Why get involved at all?’ That question might be put to the younger people here tonight. Why take part? Why not stay at home? The answer is that someone is going to get involved to lead and run the country. Why should it not be you? What went wrong in the 1930s, in part, was that bad people took over the task of leading in Germany and led us all to the precipice. It raises other questions about the role of people in public life at all and rests on a belief in free will—at least a certain amount. It is a belief that you and I can make a difference; Vicki [Bourne] and Paul [McLean] and Elizabeth [Kirkby] will recall an Australian Democrat election slogan that picked this up. The Liberal Party, in earlier, vibrant, less instrumental days, was built on this belief. The involvement of the young rests too on values, on confidence that you can help to express those values, that you will be heard, that people care, and on optimism about what is possible.

My values derived from the late nineteenth century and include a belief in the equality of people, in measures to empower people, in the removal of barriers that held people back. John Gorton was reported in a recent Bulletin as saying that, as a result of his experiences in the Great Depression:

I then had the idea, and still have, that it is ridiculous to run a country on the basis that it doesn’t matter what you do to large numbers of men as long as you keep the economy running. You can’t do that. You don’t make men and women the scapegoats for an economy that’s not running.

His sentiments are just about right. Many of us hope that the Liberal Party listens and responds to what he has said.

Certainly, we reward people in politics—promotion, position, flattery, honour; but the pursuit of reward is not sufficient purpose to be part of it all. We should be driven by our vision of what is needed and of how we can assist in achieving that. And we should know when we enter that we will leave one day—like Carrick and Syd Einfeld and [Bob] Ellicott and Freeman and Joel and Davis and [Misha] Lajovic have done. I have left at a time and for a purpose that I have chosen.
Some ask, ‘Do I leave with bitterness about the direction of politics in Australia today?’ Not at all. There are cycles in Australian politics like the cycles Arthur Schlesinger describes for the USA.\(^2\) Today’s sterile and selfish environment will give way—perhaps the young here tonight are the ones who will help John Hewson and Robert Hill make it happen. Perhaps you will give successful expression to classical liberal values of individual liberty, to empowerment and to opportunity. Perhaps you will give successful expression to our belief that change is desirable and inevitable—as did Puplick and Macphee and John Maddison. Perhaps you will give successful expression to our optimism in spite of the present situation—to our hope for a more caring polity, to a more liberal and less libertarian balance of views. Perhaps you will give successful expression to views I hold.

You are my future and my hope. I do not invite you to participate. I lay it on you as an obligation. As John McRae wrote of the Great War:

\begin{verbatim}
  Take up our quarrel with the foe,
  To you from failing hands we throw
  The torch; be yours to hold it high.
  If ye break faith with we who die
  We shall not sleep, though poppies grow in Flanders fields.\(^3\)
\end{verbatim}

Of course we are only politically dead—but the message is clear. Go for it—for all our sakes.

I will remain the same person whatever the public persona I take on. That person will continue to value the friendship of each one of you. From Peter Baume politician, farewell. Thank you all for the honour you have done us at this dinner. Thank you all.

\(^2\) Schlesinger (1999).

\(^3\) MacCrae (1919: 3).
This text is taken from *A Dissident Liberal: The Political Writings of Peter Baume*, by Peter Baume, edited by John Wanna and Marija Taflaga, published 2015 by ANU Press, The Australian National University, Canberra, Australia.