



Advocatus

So another couple of old warhorses have pulled the plug. It always seems to happen in little clumps. There's never any organisation about it. No collusion. No, 'Smithy's going to retire June 30, then Schofield September 30, then Jones on the last Friday before Christmas'. It's always sudden. In fact it's usually: 'Where's Smithy? I haven't seen him all week?'

'Haven't you heard? Done. Doctor's orders.'

A horse trainer once told me that mares are a bit like that. Just when they're about to enter the twilight of their racing careers they just stop. They won't run any more. They can't. They won't. A stallion or a gelding might forge on, their times and placings gradually getting worse. But when a mare's done she's done. Old barristers are the same. Usually with the postscript 'Doctor's orders' attached.

And so, as I walk the halls of our now depleted floor I ask the only question that matters: does this mean more work for me? I certainly hope so. You see, the Smithys, Schofields and Joneses of this world have cultivated practices like their wine cellars: rich and diverse. What if I get some of that commercial work Smithy's always hogged? Or what if I start getting that appellation stuff Schofield always seemed to horde? I can finally dream of my mortgage being knocked completely out. I could afford a Beamer or a Merc that was built this century. Oh the possibilities.

But it's been a couple of months now and the clerk hasn't exactly been ringing me every 10 minutes. Is there anything more I could be doing? Should I be selling myself as the next Smith, Schofield or Jones? No. That seems a little tacky. A bit like dancing on their graves. Besides, a new plan has emerged.

I've been walking the halls and popping in to some of my colleagues to conduct what I call 'welfare checks'.

'Everything alright Brucey?' I venture. And when the reply is mostly positive, I might offer in return: 'You know, the way

Smithy and Schofield went out really makes you think, doesn't it?'

'Why?'

'Well, you know, one day they're at their desk beavering away and the next they're gone. Doctor's orders. It's not the sort of way you want to go is it?'

'I suppose not.'

'Look at yourself, Brucey. What are you? 68-69?'

'Sixty-two.'

'Well there you go. Surely it's time you thought about going out on your terms and nobody else's. You'd have plenty in super by now?'

'Super? What's that?'

Now I know you might think me heartless and selfish, but we really need to discuss these issues as a profession. And as I saw somewhere recently we need to be asking each other: R U OK?

So I've taken it upon myself to inquire upon all members of our floor about their preparedness for life after the Bar. And I'm horrified by what I've learnt.

'Retire?' exclaimed one chap. 'I've put three kids through boarding school, divorced twice and survived one heart attack. I'll be here till I drop.'

Another chap cried: 'I married young.'

I replied: 'You got married three years ago.'

'Yes, but to a much younger woman. After I get my hip done in August we're going clubbing in Ibiza in September - whatever clubbing is - and I've just bought an electric car to reverse global warming. I won't be able to retire for some time unfortunately.'

When I approached the most senior female of our floor to discuss life after the Bar she slapped me for suggesting she was anywhere near retirement age then kicked me in the shins.

'What was the kick for?' I whined.

'If you ever read *Bar News* or watched any of those CPD videos I sent you you'd know full well I spent my 30s raising children and my 40s re-building my practice. I'll have to go to 70 until I retire and I can assure you

I'm a long way off that.'

So that's it. No more prying from me. No more caring either. It's every man and woman for themselves and if he and she refuses to think about the future then that's their problem.

As for me, I plan on being an old gelding. I'm going to run until I drop out of the placings and then hope that my faithful owner will retire me to a juicy paddock. I don't need summer at Palm Beach, nor winter in Aspen. I haven't the energy for walking the Camino de Santiago, nor the taste for fine wines or seven-course degustations.

I'm going to open an account and drop some dollars into it, hoping it will accrue over time. I'll shut up shop when the time comes, sell my outdated editions of the books I've never touched and hope that that will be enough to see me through to the grave. And if I fall short, so what? A couple of my clients are on the pension and they seem OK.

Golf on public courses. All meals at home. In fact, why not start now? No more breakfasting at Silks. No more coffees at Beanbah. It will be toast and porridge at home, Nescafe Blend 43 in the office. And as for the monthly catch-up with the lads? Well that can be BYO sandwich and we'll sit in the park instead.

Actually, upon deeper reflection, do me a favour: when the time comes take this old mule up to the top paddock and shoot him.