

Edited (ACRS) Transcript of the speech by the ACRS Patron,

His Excellency General the Honourable Sir Peter Cosgrove AK MC (Ret'd)

On the occasion of the Award of the 2014 ACRS Fellowship and to the winner of the 3M-ACRS Diamond Road Safety Award, Thursday 13th November 2014 at the Grand Hyatt, Melbourne.

Introduced by Lauchlan McIntosh AM, President, Australasian College of Road Safety

Well, thank you very much Lauchlan, for your kind introduction, and I'd like to start by paying my respects to the Wurundgeri people on whose land we meet, to the elders past and present, and to thank you very much indeed for allowing me to be your Patron. I was thrilled to be asked and delighted to accept.

I have earlier today been out and about on these great roads of Victoria where the traffic density is immense. The traffic was moving reasonably well – I'm a bit late to get here - but you expect at some stage to see 'Traffic Accident Ahead', don't you. And when I heard your President speak of the 1.3 million people who die globally, and over 40 million who are seriously injured – they are sobering statistics. I think in Australia we get over 39,000 deaths and serious injuries every year. Think of a large country town and every person in that town is either dead or having been seriously damaged by a traffic accident. And that, for an ordinary punter like me, puts it in proportion.

I was thrilled when I read up on you and found out about this great partnership you have with 3M. Mr Marino Geniotis – you are representing a great company, and their partnership with the ACRS is wonderful. And I want you to make sure that Head Office in Minnesota knows that it is such a great enabler, to create incentive for people to act as they do in this wonderfully powerful way under the umbrella of the Australasian College of Road Safety, to make life on our roads safer for all concerned.

In 1988 when I was a student at the Joint Services Staff College in Canberra, going home one afternoon on a wet road, I was involved in a high speed 10 car pile-up. I was a driver in one of the cars. And I was not injured. I was lucky. A lot of the cars were write-offs in this accident on the Lady Denman Drive, in Canberra. As I trotted around amongst the cars, just now coming to rest, looking in the cars to see who was what, just to see all those injuries was a horrible thing. And this for a soldier who is used to, through my calling, to seeing horrible sights. You know we sent a whole lot of doctors and nurses up to the tsunami that hit Papua New Guinea in 1998 where there were thousands of Papua New Guinean nationals in very remote and underdeveloped primitive parts of the north coast of New Guinea, who had been picked up by the wave, and I say picked up – it was a seaside village in Sesano Lagoon – and we sent all the intensive experts and surgeons up there. They set up shop in a place called Wanemo on the border of Papua New Guinea and Indonesia. That was the nearest centre at which they might be able to assist, and these people from this traumatised place, 80 or 90 km away staggered in, and the surgeon said that it was remarkable, it was like a giant casualty ward with traffic accidents. They referred to the action of the water,

the high velocity and the power of it – picking people up and ramming them into things. It sounded a lot like a traffic accident.

The same remark was repeated to me after the Asian tsunami when we again sent people up to Indonesia, and the scale of that was even greater. And of course, when we go off to war we see all those poor soldiers who have been blown up, shot, and they come in for urgent life-saving treatment. The surgeons we send from Australia are those who have to deal routinely with road accidents, because that's the greatest similarity.

So it's an innocent war on our roads, isn't it. Everybody means well, even those who behave badly mean well. They never go out there to get hurt. So the vigilance and the attention that a concerned and empowered community must pay to this issue is not just some opportunity to do something reasonably useful, it is absolutely vital to the cutting short of lives. And of course, the statistic of 39,000 deaths and serious injuries, going back to Lauchlan's remarks, is only part of the issue. How many families bereaved. How many survivors of traffic accidents with lesser injuries and nonetheless traumatised for some time, perhaps for life, by the remembrance of what happened in that traffic accident.

So the thought that there is an Australasian College of Road Safety, that it involves over 200 safety experts gathered tonight to take part in this awards ceremony, and no doubt around Australia many more who can't be here tonight. That the College incorporates a great diversity of expertise – private citizens to community organisations and research institutions, and corporations, thank you again, 3M, and all levels of government - is heartening and so necessary.

To get into the awards proper, as your Patron, I'm delighted to hear what some of these people did, as I preside over the award of the Fellowship - can I congratulate the new ACRS Fellow - and the winner of the 3M-ACRS Diamond Road Safety Award, to be announced this evening.

This is a wonderfully well-deserved recognition of excellence in road safety innovation. Long may those individuals continue to contribute and long may we pray for the further success of the Australasian College of Road Safety.

Thank you.