

CHANCELLOR,

I have the honour to present to you for the award of the degree of Doctor of Letters, Honoris Causa, Edward Joseph Egan,

This award will recognise outstanding community service and notable achievement in the fields of Aboriginal affairs, historical studies, and the preservation and promotion of Australia's cultural heritage, particularly song, verse and folklore.

Ted Egan, as he is best known, was born in Melbourne in 1932. He came to Darwin in 1949, and before long Ted found that he had a strong rapport with Aboriginal people and a ready ability to learn their languages. At first he lived at Belsen Camp, near St. Mary's Catholic church, where he soon found himself kicking a football with Tiwi people who were associated with the church.

Bishop John O'Loughlin asked him to help form a football team, and Ted became the first captain of St. Mary's football club. Three years later he was still captain when the Club won its first premiership.

Ted's empathy with Aborigines was noticed by Territory's Minister Paul Hasluck, who invited him to join the Native Affairs Branch as a Cadet Patrol Officer. His new career began under the tutelage of such illustrious and experienced Territorians as Gordon Sweeney, Bill Harney and Ted Evans. Before long, Ted was appointed a Protector of Aborigines, and sent to remote places such as Borroloola and Groote Eylandt. In 1956 he successfully completed the course for Patrol Officers at the Australian School of Pacific Administration in Sydney.

In 1957, he helped to establish Maningrida, a new community on the central Arnhem Land Coast, and in 1958 he was appointed Superintendent of the Welfare Branch settlement at Yuendumu.

In 1960, Ted became one of the pioneers of the outstation movement when he persuaded Minister Hasluck to support Aborigines who wanted to live in decentralised places away from the main settlement.

While at Yuendumu Ted began studying externally for an Arts degree through the Australian National University. His studies were illuminated by hurricane lamps, and he eventually gained his degree with the aid of many gallons of kerosene.

After four years at Yuendumu, Ted was appointed Superintendent at Bagot. However, he had by now resolved to become a Welfare Branch teacher, and two years at Teachers' Training

College in Brisbane followed. Subsequently, he was appointed to teach at schools at Newcastle Waters and Angurugu, on Groote Eylandt.

In the late 1960s he became disillusioned with official policy, particularly concerning the “walk off” of Aboriginal people from Wave Hill station in 1966, and the response to the struggle of the Yolngu people of Gove Peninsula to secure a voice in decisions about proposals to mine bauxite on their land. Ted’s song “Gurindji Blues”, written at this time, is still one of Australia’s most powerful and effective protest songs.

In 1970 Ted’s friend Dr. H.C. (“Nugget”) Coombs encouraged him to go to Canberra to take up a position with the Council for Aboriginal Affairs. He spent the next few years in Canberra and Sydney, working for the Council and then the newly formed Department of Aboriginal Affairs.

In 1977 Ted left the public service to become a full-time entertainer, based in Alice Springs. For many years he had listened with a keen ear to the stories and songs of the north and outback, and for many years he had been a warmly appreciated impromptu entertainer at gatherings of all kinds. Now he was to apply his talent and his knowledge professionally, in a one-man show which was first called “A Drop of Rough Ted”.

The Ted Egan show is by now probably the longest running one man show in Australia. From the beginning, it has been a distillation of the essence of the people and places of the Northern Territory. Through song and story he tells of the lives of Territorians of all kinds, always subtly making the point that the Territory is a cultural river, where Aboriginal and European waters meet. His work expanded into books, films, television programs and record albums, and all of his productions have been strong sellers.

His outstanding contribution to inter-cultural understanding, through all of his work, was recognised when he was appointed to the first National Reconciliation Council. In 1991, he was appointed a Member of the Order of Australia “for services to the Aboriginal people, and for an ongoing contribution to the literary heritage of Australia through song and verse.”

In the 1950s in Darwin, Ted had become interested in incidents, which had occurred at Caledon Bay and Woodah in 1932 and 1933. These incidents had resulted in the deaths of eight people, and led to national controversy over the treatment of the Aboriginal man known as Tuckiar.

Later, when he was posted to Groote Eylandt, Ted took full advantage of the opportunity to capture the memories of the some of the last surviving people who had first-hand memories of the killings. In 1989 he won the Northern Territory History Award for his project to write an account of these incidents.

The work was successfully submitted as a thesis for the degree of Master of Arts awarded by Flinders University, and was then published as the very successful book “Justice All Their Own”, which will be an enduring and definitive record of these very significant historical events.

CHANCELLOR,

In recognition of his outstanding service to Australia, and the Northern Territory in particular; in acknowledgment of his contribution to the reconciliation of all Australians; and in gratitude for his contribution to our heritage through song, verse and narrative, I present to you for admission to the degree of Doctor of Letters, Honoris Causa Edward Joseph Egan