It was William Boyd ("Bill") Watterson II (the author of the comic strip Calvin and Hobbes) who said: "Weekends don't count unless you spend them doing something completely pointless". I am a great believer in this sentiment as many of my friends and family will attest to.

Accordingly, it was with surprise (and slight concern) last year when I received an invitation to act as a Judge on the weekend of 27 and 28 January 2017 (yes… a weekend) in the UK Student Mediation Competition.

"What?" I hear you cry!

The event was organised by Claire De Than, Deputy Director of the Institute of Law Jersey and a Jersey Law Commissioner. The Institute of Law Jersey had won the opportunity to host the event by winning the competition in 2015 with an undergraduate team coached by Claire.

The Resolution Centre in Jersey was the local sponsor and recruited about 30 local Judges from industry, mediation and legal services.

There were around 70 entrants from 17 universities and law schools from the UK. Our very own Institute of Law also had a team in the competition.

The event is in its ninth year and is designed to assist law students in understanding the value of resolving disputes and developing their skills through mediation so that they might apply their knowledge in their professional lives.

For an old hack like me, attendance at this event drew low expectation. At the end of the day, it was my Friday night and Saturday that I was giving up to listen to students who would, no doubt, confirm my antiquated prejudices that they would be ill prepared and uninterested.

How wrong I was. The event was superb. Frankly, I am a little surprised that more has not been made of it in the local media. Sometimes we forget to crow about things that we are really good at. For the Institute of Law to hold such a prestigious competition in Jersey is not only reflective of what a respected institution it has become but is another example of Jersey punching above its international weight. 17 universities and law schools! We had around 70 students with various professors and other luminaries from universities around the UK. What a fantastic advert for the Island.

The Magistrate's Court and the Institute of Law buildings were brilliantly deployed to cater for the competitions. Hotels were filled and us locals embraced the process with great zeal. Moreover, the standard of competition was extraordinarily high.

When I was a law student, back in the days when the volume of my hair was louder than U2's Joshua Tree being pumped out on my Sony Walkman, there was no such thing as mediation. Morever, the nearest that I got to experiencing real conflict at law school was when a student barman persisted in putting blackcurrant cordial in my beloved Guinness (ah… somethings never change).

These days, it appears that students are not only understanding the concept of mediation but are fully

engaged in its implementation. The quality of the mediators and those who played the parties to mediation was of the highest order. They threw themselves into the process with great skill and enthusiasm. It was a joy being witness to bright young people learning and deploying skills that will only enhance their legal careers.

It was also interesting to note that “back in the day”, law was predominantly a gentleman’s profession. This is certainly not the case today and will not be going forward, given the number of female students who represented their institutions. In fact, one professor informed me that the intake at law schools these days is about two-thirds/one-third in favour of women. I will not comment on this as I will only get into trouble. Frankly though, what a great statistic to see in action.

So as I ended my fourth judging session, it was not an issue as to whether I had given up my weekend but it was a big “thank-you” to the Institute of Law Jersey and the Resolution Centre for inviting me to be involved in such a rewarding event. Both should be very proud of their role in putting this together and something that Jersey’s industry should look upon with great pride.

When Hobbes bounds down the stairs shouting: “Turn on the TV! Get out the cereal! It’s Saaaaturday!”. I will be reminded of one January weekend in Jersey when I was doing something much more interesting.