

Women in the 'front' line

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The Northern Territory has in the past been seen by some as a real 'mans place' with the clichéd picture of a Territorian being a bloke with tats in a blue singlet and stubbies clutching a beer (or perhaps a "certain brand" iced coffee) with a large pig dog at his feet and about to hop into his ute to go fishing or pig shooting. The legal profession has also been seen as a place where "real men" fought out complicated cases in Court or sealed major deals.

Law was still an unusual career for females (at least from Bathurst) when I started at the University of New South Wales Law School in 1973 but there was a solid core of female students which grew in numbers as I progressed through the course. Some of my female colleagues at Law School went on to successful careers at the Bench and Bar in NSW, a good example being Anna Katzmann SC, President of the NSW Bar Association.

When I arrived in Darwin in the early 1980s there were already a number of notable female lawyers in practice, possibly the one I most remembered being the late Juliet Shields whose reputation as a commercial lawyer and trainer of young lawyers was outstanding.

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It is still interesting to read copies of some of her correspondence and think of the effect some of her more forceful and razor sharp communications would have had on the unfortunate recipients whether in or out of the public service..

One of the most notable female solicitors during my time in the territory was the late Donna Dreier who was an outstanding leader of the Litigation Division of the NT Attorney-General's Justice Department and partner of Cridlands. She also had the reputation as a superb trainer of junior practitioners (her green pen was legendary) and many owe their successful careers to her mentoring in the early stages.

Dawn Ray is not the first female Northern Territory Chief Parliamentary Council (Gale Jamieson, now in WA also held that office). She was in the Territory for a while in the 1970's and 1980's before having a good 'drafting' career in Canberra and Brisbane.

I never worked with Nerolie Withnall, who was the first female President of the Law Society of the Northern Territory (and indeed of any Australian Law Society), who left for Brisbane and a brilliant career as

a corporate lawyer in 1981. I was happy to meet up with her in the 'noughties' on CAMAC and she had not lost her elegance, brilliance and ability to win arguments at the same time deflating some overdeveloped male egos!

Sally Thomas SM soon became Chief Magistrate on the way to her appointment as a Justice of the Supreme Court 30 July 1992 and an eminent and successful judicial career. Her Honour was (and is) actively involved with Australian Women Lawyers.

I recently spoke to Her Honour on how she was enjoying retirement; it would not be difficult to acknowledge she is very much enjoying it and is as busy as ever.

Women have continued their important role on the law in the Territory and it would be hard to list them all in senior positions in Government, legal aid organisations and private law practices.

It was a pleasure, on taking up my current position with the Society, to meet the late Mary Ridsdale in Alice Springs who was a pioneer in her profession, ending up as a member of the NT Liquor Commission.

I did not meet Deputy Chief Magistrate Cathy Deland but it has been a pleasure working with Chief Magistrate Jenny Blokland who as well as being a great Magistrate has pioneered a number of initiatives to improve Court operations. Her female colleagues, Sue Oliver SM

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and Melanie Little, are also great magistrates and, are from my perspective, good to deal with.

It will be interesting to see who the next Magistrates appointed are.

Janet Terry, a long-term Territory practitioner is now Federal Magistrate Terry overseeing much Family Law work in the Territory.

The appointments of Suzan Cox and Raelene Webb as the first Territory Queens Counsel in 2004 were a welcome development. Sue has also given good leadership

to the NT Legal Aid Commission. Her deputy, Meredith Harrison, also had spent some time as the dynamic Chief Executive Officer of the Northern Territory Attorney-General's Department in the 1990s.

The Hon Judith Kelly was the Territory's first Senior Counsel appointee but left her career at the Bar when appointed as a Justice of the Supreme Court. In her speech, recorded in *Balance*, she encouraged more female lawyers to join the Bar.

There are a number of successful female barristers including Sally Gearin, Sue Porter, Jodie Truman and Georgia McMaster who is National President of Australian Women Lawyers.

There are some very good current female Crown Prosecutors including Dr Nanette Rogers in Alice Springs and Libby Armitage. Many other women are actively involved in Court work at various levels so I think it is only a matter of time before more join the Bar. Many females are happy to work their way up in other areas whether it is in other areas of the Department of Justice or in private practice.

Whilst the current Attorney-General (and deputy Chief Minister, Treasurer and Minister for Planning and Infrastructure), Hon Delia Lawrie, does not have formal legal qualifications she has been very effective in her portfolio.

The Territory profession has, at the moment a number of women in senior positions not counting those we have “exported” to other jurisdictions such as Justice Lindy Jenkins of the Supreme Court of Western Australia, FM Kate Hughes, and Jenny Hardy, Director of the Queensland Legal Aid Commission.

It will be interesting to see how the now “young” female lawyers carry the torch in the future. You have some good examples to follow, and some big Jimmy Choos to fill! ⌋

CALLING FOR EXPRESSIONS OF INTEREST

FAMILY LAW COMMITTEE

THE LAW SOCIETY NORTHERN TERRITORY IS CALLING FOR EXPRESSIONS OF INTEREST FROM PEOPLE INTERESTED IN JOINING THE LSNT FAMILY LAW COMMITTEE. INTERESTED PARTIES SHOULD REGISTER THEIR INTEREST BY E-MAIL OR POST WITH BARBARA BRADSHAW, INCLUDING A SHORT SUMMARY OF THEIR RELEVANT EXPERIENCE AND EXPERTISE.

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