

The Australian Women's Register

Entry type: Person
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Shelton, Ann

(1942 -)

Born 1 January, 1942, Shepparton Victoria Australia

Occupation Barrister, Lawyer

Summary

Ann Shelton graduated in 1964, winning the Anna Brennan Memorial Prize for the woman placed highest in the final year law class at the University of Melbourne. She went on to be Victorian Parliamentary Counsel, where she worked with the legendary John Finemore.

Go to 'Details' below to read a reflective essay written by Ann Shelton for the Trailblazing Women and the Law Project.

Details

The following additional information was provided by Ann Shelton and is reproduced with permission in its entirety.

I was born in Shepparton in 1942. My father, John Riordan, was a solicitor there.

After 4 years as a boarder at Genazzano College, I matriculated and received a Commonwealth Scholarship. Prior to receiving the scholarship I had always thought 'If I were a boy I would do Law!' I find this extraordinary now, but, I guess, being a country girl with no knowledge of any female lawyers, it wasn't so silly at the time. I am eternally grateful I received that scholarship! In 1960, I commenced the Law course at Melbourne University (the only Law Course in Victoria at that time).

In 1962 I was invited to join the Melbourne University Law Review, which of course I accepted. I completed my course in 1963 and on graduating in March 1964 I was awarded the Anna Brennan prize for the top female law student. I was delighted when, at this time, Colum Brennan gave me the wig of his aunt, Anna Brennan. Anna Brennan was the second woman, and the first Australian-born woman, admitted to practise in Victoria.

I did Articles with my father, in Shepparton and stayed on there for another approximately 12 months. I loved my time there with Dad and it was all a great experience .

Back in Melbourne, I worked for a short time, approximately 12 months, as one of the Solicitors in the free legal service of the RACV – and for the first and only time in my life, became an expert in one area of law – Road Traffic Law!

From there, in the latter part of 1967, I moved to the Parliamentary Draftman's Office, as it was then called. It was subsequently renamed the Parliamentary Counsel's Office, and after this title change, the lawyers in the office all signed the Bar Roll.

During my time in the PCO, John Finemore was the Chief. He was a great teacher and boss. I loved the work and John gave me many wonderful opportunities.

I was part of the Victorian support team at meetings of the Standing Committee of Attorneys General. I found this interesting – both the work and the personalities involved. And I enjoyed the interstate travel it entailed.

In 1970 I took 6 months leave of absence to travel in Europe. After about 4 months I was in Norway and received a letter from John Finemore asking me to stay on in London for approximately 6 extra months to do research. After some hesitation – I was all geared to be home after 6, not 12 months – I agreed. Thank God I did, as I loved every minute of that 6 months and it was an experience of a lifetime.

In London I worked primarily in the Public Records Office, by the Silver Vaults. I was also in the Foreign & Commonwealth Library, opposite 10 Downing Street, and did some research in the Duchy of Cornwall Offices both in London and Cornwall.

My research was into early correspondence between the Colonial Office and the various Australian states with a view to discerning

the attitude at that time into ownership of the offshore areas of the country.

I reported to Professor Daniel O'Connell in Adelaide and after my return home I flew to Adelaide to assist in sorting out the relevant parts of my reports. This resulted in a book, authored by Professor O'Connell & me, entitled "Opinions on Imperial Constitutional Law", published by the Law Book Company of Victoria in 1971.

In 1973, I was sent to the USA & Canada to study their Federal systems. I took my annual leave at the same time, and en route spent 2 weeks in London. Whilst there, I was roped into doing some more research – I don't recall by whom or into what. But I thoroughly enjoyed being back in London and briefly working there again, and felt it made my whole trip worthwhile – at that time I had no interest at all in the USA and Canada.

Before leaving Australia I had bought a Visit USA air ticket, for \$50 US. With this ticket, before starting work, I flew all round the States, including Alaska, & by the time I'd finished, I was fascinated by the States & had quite forgotten London!

My research work there took me up the east coast of the USA and to Ottawa and Toronto in Canada. I loved it all and again it was a wonderful experience, perhaps all the more so because I was there in the middle of the Watergate hearings! In addition to the interesting work and personalities, I was struck by the extraordinary hospitality I experienced. Although very much on the move from city to city, I was invited home for dinner virtually every night, until in the end, exhausted, I had to refuse!

Later that year I was secretary to the Victorian delegation to the Constitutional Convention in Sydney. The purpose of the Convention was to look at the modern day working of our Constitution i.e. the reality at that time of the power sharing under the Constitution between the Commonwealth and States. John Finemore was very involved in the organisation of the Convention. It was a huge affair, including the Prime Minister and Federal Opposition leader, the Premiers and Opposition leaders of each State and numerous other elected representatives from government and opposition in the various Parliaments across the country – plus, of course numerous support staff. It was a huge amount of work but again, another wonderful and fascinating experience for me!

In 1974 I married Frank Shelton, a lawyer who later became a County Court judge. Quite sadly, I retired from the Parliamentary Counsel's Office in 1975, just before the birth of our first child.

I continued doing some drafting work at home, but, to my surprise, despite enjoying the work, I found working from home very sterile, and I realised it wasn't just the work I enjoyed but the whole scene.

Some years later, I did some work at home for Monash University. Then in 1998 I began part -time work in the Monash University Solicitor's Office, drafting the statutes & vetting the regulations of the University. This was the perfect job for an otherwise busy mother of 5 and I thoroughly enjoyed my time there. I finally retired in 2009.

From my father, I believe, I inherited a love of the law. And I wasn't the only one of our family to do so. We were a family of 6 children, and 4 of us became lawyers. The youngest, Peter, was recently appointed to the Supreme Court of Victoria. And this love of the law has even gone down to the next generation – we have two daughters in the Law, and my three legal brothers each have one or two young lawyers in their family.

The law has certainly been very good to me and I am most grateful for all the wonderful experiences and enjoyment it has given me and for the continuing interest it provides.

Published resources

Site Exhibition

Australian Women Lawyers as Active Citizens, Trailblazing Women Lawyers Project Team, 2016,
<http://www.womenaustralia.info/lawyers>

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