Entry type: Person
Entry ID: AWE5643

Croucher, Rosalind Frances

(1954 -)

Born	19541114, Sydney New South Wales Australia
Occupation	Academic, Commissioner, Lawyer, Musician, Solicitor

Summary

Professor Rosalind Croucher AM is a leading legal academic and current (2016) president of the Australian Law Reform Commission (ALRC). In 2014, she was the inaugural winner of the Australian Woman Lawyer (AWL) Award. She was described as:

‘an inspirational leader in the legal community, making a distinct contribution to law reform and legal education across the national stage. She has enthusiastically taken on ‘tough’ roles with great success and is a true institution builder. Prof Croucher restored the reputation of Macquarie Law School and successfully steered the ALRC through two inquiries which threatened the ALRC’s very existence. At the ALRC she has led seven inquiries of great public policy significance, including on family violence, older workers, and disability. She is also an exceptional mentor, with a deep and abiding commitment to fostering the careers of others, particularly women.’

Professor Croucher was appointed President of the Australian Human Rights Commission, 30 July 2017, for a seven year term.

Details

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

Early years

I was born on 14 November 1954, at Rosslyn Hospital, Arncliffe, Sydney, the eldest of four girls born to Frank Roland McGrath AM C and Amy Gladys McGrath (née Cumpston) OAM, and a Scorpio.

I grew up with the value of education imprinted in my DNA-particularly on the maternal side. My mother is one of four sisters and thr brothers. Her father, Dr John Howard Lidgett Cumpston CMG, was the first Commonwealth Director General of Public Health-the numberplate ACT 4 is still in the family. His mother, Elizabeth (née Newman) was a pioneer kindergarten teacher. Sadly, my grandfa died the year I was born so I never got to know him. He had a profound commitment to education-and that his daughters would have same opportunities as his sons. For women in the 1930s and early 1940s this was still pretty unusual. My grandfather said to his chi that he could not leave them ‘capital’, but he would give them an education. In my mother’s generation this was an exceptional stand create as ‘the norm’ for his children. This is not ‘normal’ for many, but it did influence me profoundly. Three of them gained PhDs (th eldest, in 1998, at the age of 82), one became a Reader in History at Birkbeck College, University of London (Dr Ina Mary Cumptson an entomologist and researcher in PNG on mosquitoes, with her medical doctor husband (Dr Margaret Spencer OAM); another, my mother, a poet, playwright, novelist and all-round extraordinary woman. The youngest, Maeva Elizabeth Galloway BEM, had the pro of doing medicine, but, as she said to me, she wanted to get married and medical study was not amenable to married women at the so she did physiotherapy instead. Later she spent many years managing the Canberra Symphony Orchestra.

I was named after the character Rosalind in Shakespeare’s play, As You Like It. It was Shakespeare’s largest role for a female char and one in which she is even given the Epilogue. (My sister Leone Celia Lorrimer, was also named after a character in the play, Ros cousin, Celia. She is an architect and now CEO of a large architectural practice in Australia.)

When I was four years old we moved from Grand Parade, Brighton-le-Sands to ‘Purfleet’, in Billyard Avenue, Elizabeth Bay, an histo house on the waterfront side of Arthur McElhone Reserve and Elizabeth Bay House (although not on the waterfront).

After attending kindergarten in Rushcutter’s Bay, opposite Trumper Park in Roslyn Gardens, Sydney, I went to Sydney Church of En

Girls School in Darlinghurst until the end of third class. I remember catching the bus from our home in Elizabeth Bay to William Stree then walking up Forbes Street. I took my younger sister, Leone, who was in the class behind me. We would only have been about 7 8.Our mother had two small children, our younger sisters Eloise and Vivian, so she trusted us to be responsible in getting ourselves from school. For the most part we were, although I do recall our walking up a gutter full of rainwater. (If you had wet shoes you were allowed to take them off!) My mother tells me that the Headmistress suggested I should go to a school where I could get more competition-or perhaps she wanted to get rid of me! One of my school chums from my SCEGGS days was Jenny Morgan, now Prof of Law at the University of Melbourne.

I did move school, to Woollahra Demonstration School, in fourth class. My teacher was Mr Miller. The cane was still used regularly, for girls (although very rarely by Mr Miller). I participated in lots of extra things, the Gould League (for bird lovers), the junior Red Cro which had a lovely uniform, and the school choir, led by Mr Armstrong. (At Sunday School at All Saints Church, Woollahra, I joined t Girls' Friendly Society-yet another uniform that mother happily purchased).

I was once summoned to the Headmaster's office at Woollahra (Mr Nicholson). I had thrown a blackboard duster at a boy who was l bit of a wag, but the dust had got in his eyes and caused him suffering. I remember the sickening feeling both of knowing I had caus injury but also of that conversation in the Headmaster's office.

The test in fourth class saw me catapulted into the Opportunity Class for the final two years of primary. The two years with Miss Con were a wonderful experience. I was also elected girls Vice-Captain in 6th class. Two of my classmates I still see regularly-the Hon Ju Anna Katzmann of the Federal Court and Professor Vivienne Bath of the University of Sydney.

At the end of my years at Woollahra I went to Ascham school in Edgecliff, while my peers went in different directions-a number to Sy Girls High and some also to SCEGGS. My years at Ascham were a wonderful period. (It could have begun much earlier, however. M mother said that she took me for an interview when I was very small and that, after somersaulting off the chair in the Headmistress's or other antics, I was not enthusiastically given that first opportunity of enrolment). I ended as dux of the school and Chairman of the Committee. We didn't have 'prefects' and 'school captain' but we had a School Committee, with a Chairman and Secretary. I remem one particular meeting of the School Committee that I chaired. There was quite a lively discussion and, to inject some order into the proceedings, I said, 'would you please direct your questions through the chair!' The Headmistress, Miss Roberts, was quite surprise she didn't know was that I was an avid listener of parliament. My 'dream job' in my teenage imaginings was to be Speaker of the Ho Music was largely whatever the music master, Mr Ken Robbins, could arrange. Choir was always fun, especially the joint choral wor did with a boys school, Cranbrook or Sydney Grammar. Mr Robbins also organised an 'orchestra', a handful of those who played something. I had played recorder at Woollahra and volunteered. There was a senior girl who played oboe, and I thought the sound w wonderful. A Canberra cousin of mine had an oboe and lent it to me and I was hooked. My first experience playing oboe in the orche was very challenging: 'He who would valiant be', in Eb major-three flats. But it got easier. The first big, and paid, 'gig' I did was to pla the orchestra for 'The Mikado', being performed by Sydney University Musical Society (SUMS). By the HSC I undertook 1st Level M an independent study, as I could not do it at school. Throughout high school I attended as many music camps as my holidays would first at Sydney Grammar School under the music leadership of Peter Seymour, and then national music camp. I completed what wou be regarded as a huge load for my HSC, and all at 1st level: English, German, Geography, Modern History, Maths and Music, plus t General Studies subject that everyone had to do.

All through my high school years two things I remember, apart from school things, were my mother's PhD and the theatres. Mum wo scholarship, about the same time as father was appointed a judge, to undertake the history of medical organisation in Australia. Fron emerged a whole range of whitegoods (clothes dryer etc) and school holiday trips in our red and white Volkswagen microbus to all p Australia where mum did research on her thesis. She used a manual typewriter. The tap-tapping of the keys punctuated many eveni over many years. She graduated in 1977.

The second thing was that mother had a theatre in our backyard-the Mews Playhouse-as a tryout theatre for Australian playwrights, we moved from Elizabeth Bay to Centennial Park. I recall actors like Lex Marinos, Lynne Rainbow and John Meillon, to name but a f performing in plays. My sister Leone and I often helped with stage management. (One mistake was to use real whiskey instead of co which is the usual stage substitute!). The Mews developed into a much bigger project with the establishment of the Australian Theat Newtown. Playwrights like David Williamson and the Indigenous writer, Kevin Gilbert, had try-outs of their plays either at our home in Road, Centennial Park (down the road from Patrick White), or in Newtown. The opera director, David Freeman, was assisted in the beginnings of his career when he directed when of mother's music theatre pieces on Sir Walter Ralegh, and another on the Children Crusade. I performed in a couple of the musicals at the Australian Theatre: 'Crusade' and 'A Bunch of Ratbags', set in the 1950s. M was regularly organising special events, often associated with fundraising for the theatre, and on one occasion the actress, who was read some poems, was unable to perform at the last minute. I was rapidly 'press-ganged' into the task. A huge enterprise was a mus theatre symposium which saw her bringing Stephen Sondheim, Tim Rice, Alan Jay Lerner and several other incredibly famous musi theatre luminaries from around the world to Sydney. That was all part of the normal of our lives at Martin Road!

Father, meanwhile, was appointed to bench in 1966 (the Workers' Compensation Commission, later Compensation Court), chaired t Council of NSW and endeavoured to get his teenage daughters into sailing, through the Double Bay Sailing Club. In the latter endea he was much more successful with my sister Leone, a keen and excellent sailor now, than me. (When my father retired from the ben the age of 72, as Chief Judge of the Compensation Court, he also undertook a PhD, in history at the University of Sydney-he had be University Medallist in history when he completed his BA).

University

With my HSC result I could choose whatever I wanted to do. I had no inclination to study Medicine (although many of my mother's fa

were doctors), but wanted to do Law, like my father. I won a much-coveted National Undergraduate Scholarship at the Australian Na University, which paid for absolutely everything. I note that the dux of the year ahead of me at Ascham, Hilary Penfold (now the Hon Hilary Penfold of the ACT Supreme Court), also went to ANU on these excellent scholarships). I went to Burgmann College, a co-educational college, and embarked upon Arts/Law. I also joined the Canberra Symphony Orchestra. Just before I went to Canbe early 1973, my oboe teacher enlisted me as her Deputy, to play in 'Jesus Christ Superstar' at the Capitol Theatre in Sydney (bedeck mission, now 'Superstar', brown). I played the Friday and Saturday shows. I was able to continue this after going to Canberra, flying for the purpose. (I remember the return student airfare was $14). I had underestimated what the shift to Canberra would involve and returned to Sydney at the end of first year, but keeping my options open with ANU for another year.

In 1974 I commenced studies at Sydney University in second year of Arts/Law. I played in the Australian Youth Orchestra at the end year. During my second year of university study my musical involvement took me to audition for the ABC Training Orchestra and I w scholarship that I took up in 1975. I also joined the Renaissance Players at the University under the amazing Winsome Evans OAM My involvement in the Training Orchestra meant that I only continued my History Honours study in third year, doing no law subjects year. During 1975 Training Orchestra the position of second oboe/cor anglais became available in the Elizabethan Theatre Trust Orchestra, later the Opera and Ballet orchestra, and I was successful. In 1976 I was playing in the opera house but also was undert History Honours. It was a very full year. After six months in the opera house orchestra I left that position, preferring the variety of mu involvement in the Renaissance Players and opting to finish my law studies. I kept playing in casual positions for the orchestra as ne for a further two years. And in 1976 I married Michael Jeffrey Atherton, a lute player and multi-instrumentalist in the Renaissance Pla entered my final two years at law school in a minority – I was married.

I completed History Honours, with a thesis on a renaissance diplomat, Sir Nicholas Thockmorton, continued with the Renaissance P and plugged away at my law studies. My aim by this time was to follow my father's example and to go to the Bar, after a period of pr as a Solicitor.

But when I was at the College of Law, doing my Practical Legal Training course in 1980, I found out that I was pregnant. When I was admitted as a solicitor in December 1980 in the Supreme Court of New South Wales, it was not as a 'lawyer' but as 'a solicitor, proct attorney' of 'this honourable Court'. And Sir Laurence Street as Chief Justice had a famous invocation to any mother with a crying ba deployed at each ceremony: 'Madam, do not feel you have to leave, this is a family occasion!'.

When my daughter, Emily Alexandra McGrath Jones Atherton, was born in March 1981, I was utterly clueless about motherhood. Al I had worked two years part-time with a firm of solicitors, as successor to my classmate in my law studies at Sydney University, Sus Crennan (later Justice of the High Court), in a research/devilling role, obtained my practising certificate, and could have continued th the demands of motherhood came as a real shock. They were incompatible for me at that time. So I held a practising certificate for o one year. I also left the Renaissance Players. My career journey then took a different turn.

Academic years

When my daughter was nearly a year old I applied for a position in teaching at Macquarie University. I got it. Curiously, what secured the teaching position, at the age of 27, was none of the things that a career path would have mapped out. Not a higher degree-I had even thought about that one yet, the PhD would come later, although I did have an Honours degree in History which evidenced rese ability; not publications-I didn't have any of those-all essential these days even to start in the academic world. But I did have teachin experience-in music. I had taught a residential summer school in early music, with a group aged from 17 to 70. It was a great backgr for teaching distance students, who came in for weekends at a time on campus. It was quite an enlightened approach to appointmen the late Professors Jack Goldring and John Peden – two inspiring men, both passing away long before they should have.

Then the teaching was like a duck to water. I loved it. I built an academic career from that accidental starting point. I completed a Ph legal history at the University of New South Wales, graduating in 1994-as Sir Gordon Samuels' last doctoral conferral in his role of Chancellor of UNSW before taking up the position of Governor. I embarked upon publications and became a Professor and Dean in at Macquarie University. My doctoral study took ten years, worked around fulltime work and my children, including in 1987 my secon Marc Edward John McGrath Jones Atherton.

The two early years at Macquarie were during an intensely controversial time in its history. It shared the tension of left/right argumen had been dividing English, Economics, Politics departments as well as law schools in the US, the UK and Australia for a number of troubled years. I was elected to Chair the School meetings, just in my second year as a Tutor-the youngest on staff. In my naïveté it occurred to me that this had anything other than to do with my abilities. But I did take it very seriously, learned a lot about chairing a my eyes opened to university (and broader) politics.

In 1984 I was appointed to the University of New South Wales and then in 1990 to Sydney University, where I move into a number o increasingly senior leadership roles, including as Head, Department of Law (Jan 1996-Feb 1997); Acting Dean (June 1994, July 199 Interim Dean (Feb 1997-March 1998). In 1998, I was elected as Deputy Chair of the Academic Board of the University.

At the end of 1999 I took up an appointment as the first externally-appointed Dean of the Law School at Macquarie University, a pos which I served for over seven years.
I have now done a circuit of three major Sydney law schools: two years at Macquarie, seven at UNSW, nine at Sydney and then bac Macquarie for seven. I accidentally got on another track and it opened up a whole new career path. 25 years, including the last seve of it as Dean of Macquarie Law School, and over a year as Interim Dean at Sydney Law School (the first woman in that position).

In 1995 I sang in a small group of lawyers organised by the Hon Justice Peter Hidden, known as the Bar Choir. It is still going and I singing with them, 20 years later. (Many of the barristers who sang in the choir in the early days are now on the Bench, and many a

singing in the choir too.) In 1994 I auditioned for the Sydney Philharmonia Choir and joined the Alto section. After singing in the Sym choir for three years I was invited to join the Motet choir-if felt like being in 'the first eleven'. With this choir I sang at the opening cere of the Sydney Olympic Games in 2000 and as part of The Proms at Albert Hall, London, singing Mahler 8th symphony, which we ha sung in Sydney.

In 2001 my marriage to Michael Atherton was dissolved. In 2004 I married Professor John Sydney Croucher, a statistician, of Macqu University, and became the second 'Professor Croucher'. (We have now been married for over eleven wonderful years.)

Australian Law Reform Commission

The opportunity to join the Australian Law Reform Commission came in 2006, after I had been Dean of Law at Macquarie for seven The position of Commissioner was advertised. I was appointed for three years. The Hon Philip Ruddock MP was the Attorney-Gene the end of 2009 the position of President became vacant and the then Attorney, the Hon Robert McClelland MP appointed me for fiv years. This was renewed by the Hon Senator George Brandis QC for a further year to December 2015. I am now up to my fifth Attorney-General! I retain my chair at Macquarie University, which has kindly given me leave for the duration of my appointment at t ALRC.

At the ALRC I was the Commissioner in charge of the following inquiries:

Capacity, Equality and Disability in Commonwealth laws, ALRC 124, 2014
Access All Ages-Older Workers and Commonwealth Laws, ALRC 120, 2013.
Family Violence and Commonwealth Laws-Improving Legal Frameworks, ALRC 117, 2012.
Managing Discovery-Discovery of Documents in Federal Courts, ALRC 115, 2011.
Family Violence-A National Legal Response, ALRC 114, 2010.
Secrecy Laws and Open Government in Australia, ALRC 112, 2009.
Privilege in Perspective, Australian Law Reform Commission, ALRC 107, 2008.

Other reports I have overseen as President, with another Commissioner in charge:

Connection to country: Review of the Native Title Act 1993 (Cth), ALRC 126, 2015 (with Commissione Professor Lee Godden, University of Melbourne)
Serious Invasions of Privacy in the Digital Era, ALRC 123, 2014 (with Commissioner Professor Barbar McDonald, University of Sydney)
Copyright and the Digital Economy, ALRC 122, 2013 (with Commissioner Professor Jill McKeough, UT
Classification-Content Regulation and Convergent Media, ALRC 118, 2012 (with Commissioner Profes Terry Flew, QUT)

I am currently leading the inquiry into encroachments on traditional rights, freedoms and privileges in Commonwealth laws. My work ALRC draws upon all the various aspects of my academic and management experiences and adds to it a wonderful layer of interse with government, through its various departments, and the parliament itself-particularly the twice-yearly Senate Estimates appearan (which, perversely perhaps, I enjoy greatly).

Pro bono roles

I have undertaken many pro bono leadership roles-including as Governor of Ascham School for nine years; Councillor of St Andrew' College; as a board member of the Sydney Philharmonia Choirs; Chair of the Council of Australian Law Deans, 2002-2003; Vice-Pre of the International Academy of Estate and Trust law 2000-2005; and as Chair of the Projects Committee of the Australian Academy 2012-. I have also been involved with the NSW Women Lawyers in committee roles over the years, particularly in relation to career aspirations.

Honours

I was honoured in being elected to the International Academy of Estate and Trust Law, 1993; as a Fellow, Royal Society for the encouragement of the Arts, Manufactures and Commerce, 2000; a Member, Australian Academy of Forensic Sciences, 2004; a Fou Fellow of the Australian Academy of Law in 2007; and elected to the Society of Trusts and Estate Practitioners in 2008.

My contributions have also been acknowledged in a number of honorary appointments: Honorary Fellow of St Andrew's College of t University of Sydney (2002); Honorary Fellow of the Australian College of Legal Medicine (2004); 'Rapporteur' for the 8th biennial conference of the International Association of Women Judges, 2006; and honorary life membership of the Women Lawyers' Associa NSW (2013). On St Andrew's College I was the first lay woman appointed to the College Council, while the Rev Theodora Hobbes w appointed the first female member of the Presbyterian clergy-we were part of the Council that moved the College from an all-male C to a fully co-residential one. (The very-much missed Theodora, who passed away in 2011, also conducted the marriage proceedings John and I married, by Macquarie University's lake, in 2004-the first time she had married anyone 'in a paddock', she said. I was del to present the St Andrew's College Lecture in 2013 in honour of her.)

In 2011 I was recognised as one of the 40 ‘inspirational alumni’ of UNSW. In 2014 I was acknowledged for my contributions to public policy as one of Australia’s ‘100 Women of Influence’ in the Australian Financial Review and Westpac awards; and for ‘outstanding contribution to the legal profession’ in supporting and advancing women in the legal profession I was awarded the Australian Women Lawyer’s award.

In the Australia Day Honours list, 2015, I was conferred the award of Member of the Order of Australia (AM) for ‘significant service to the law as an academic, to legal reform and education, to professional development, and to the arts’. My husband, Professor John Croucher, also received an AM on the same day, ‘significant service to mathematical science in the field of statistics, as an academic, author, and mentor, and to professional organisations’. ‘What are the odds?’, we asked each other!

Publications

My text on Succession law, Succession: families, property and death, (with Prue Vines) was first published in 1996, and is now in its 4th edition (2013). I have edited seven books, including Families and Estates: A Comparative Study, Kluwer Law International, 2005; Law and Religion-God, the State and the Common Law, with Peter Radan and Denise Meyerson, Routledge Publishing, 2005; and written 20 book chapters, including most recently: ‘Towards a common legislative base for inquiries’, in Royal Commissions & Public Inquiries: Practice & Potential , S Prasser and H Tracey (eds), Connor Court Publishing, 2014; and ‘Family law: challenges for responding to family violence in a federal system’, in Families, policy and the law: Selected essays on contemporary issues for Australia, A Hayes and D Higgins (eds), Australian Institute of Family Studies, 2014. I have a long list of journal articles and conference papers as befits a University Professor.

I have also written the lyrics for three choral works, composed by Michael Atherton:

> ‘Songs for Imberombera’, with W Porter-Young and M Atherton, for work commissioned by the Gondw
> Voices choir. First performed January 1997.
> ‘Exhortation’ Contemporary Singers. First performed July 1996. Review in Opera Australia, Aug-Sept 1
> ‘splendidly poetic text’.
> ‘Namatjira’ for work Australian Voices Choir 1996. First performed 1996. Recorded on The Listening La
> Australian Choral Music, VOICES CD 1002, 6m 11s.

Other interests

I greatly enjoy my garden, restoring and extending the garden at our Blue Mountains home, ‘Weroona’, a former boys’ home that John and I bought in May 2013, complete with its own cricket pitch and a spare house, ‘The Lodge’, which my parents live in on weekends (my father still driving at age 93). I continue to find enormous pleasure in choral singing and in playing my oboe and recorder in chamber music. I am also a proud grandmother to Alessandra and Cara Montuori.

Published resources

Article
Rosalind Croucher - On the Couch, Ackland, Richard, 2010,
http://www.justinian.com.au/featurettes/rosalind-croucher.html

Resource Section
ALRC President wins legal accolades, 2104,
https://www.alrc.gov.au/news-media/alrc-president-wins-legal-accolades

Commission welcomes new President, 2017,
https://www.humanrights.gov.au/news/stories/commission-welcomes-new-president

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

Author Details
Rosalind Croucher

Created 4 May 2016
Last modified 4 August 2025

Digital resources



Title: Rosalind Croucher
Type: Image
Date: 3 May, 2023