Entry type: Person
Entry ID: AWE5650

Conroy, Patricia

(1936 - 2023)

Born	19360317, Brisbane Queensland Australia
Died	20231213, Brisbane Queensland Australia
Occupation	Community Leader, Lawyer, Solicitor

Summary

Admitted as a Solicitor of the Supreme Court of Queensland in 1965, Patricia Conroy (nee Herlihy), established two partnerships with Martin Conroy in 1966 that remained steadfast – marriage in July and then a business partnership in December. In the intervening period, the couple travelled to the remote north Queensland town of Mt Isa, where they established their firm, Conroy and Conroy Solicitors. Conroy was the first woman to practise in remote north-western Queensland, and she was one half of the first husband and wife partnership to practice state-wide.

Patricia Conroy was interviewed by Nikki Henningham for the Trailblazing Women and the Law Oral History Project. For details of the interview see the National Library of Australia CATALOGUE RECORD.

Details

Working in Mt Isa took some getting used to, and the remote location presented some challenges that practitioners from Townsville, let alone Brisbane, could never imagine, but there was plenty of work to be done and the Conroys quickly established themselves as hardworking and caring counsel. The mining town environment created a diverse professional landscape; from crime to conveyance and commercial work, the tragedy of personal injury and estate settlements and the complexity of family law, the Conroys handled the full complement of legal matters one could expect in a regional community. In so doing, it became apparent to Patricia the number of services, such as social workers, or marriage and financial guidance counsellors, Mt Isa lacked, because she seemed to be providing many of these services herself!

Seeing community problems that needed solutions, she sought to find them. While running a successful partnership and raising a family of four children, Conroy contributed time and energy to important community initiatives. She was Foundation President of the Mount Isa Welfare Council, foundation member of the Mt Isa Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Service and the Honorary Solicitor and Trustee of the Kalkadoon Aboriginal Sobriety House, to name only three organisations she contributed to. ‘One of the great advantages of being a lawyer,’ observes Conroy, ‘especially living in a country town, is that the public observes you to have flexibility and clout…’ She used that clout to make a difference to the lives of Aboriginal and other marginalised people living in Mt Isa, and to women who might not have otherwise sought help in the masculine mining town.

Another advantage Conroy acknowledges is the importance of the support she had in the early year when she was establishing her professional practice and her community leadership. Be it the inspiration provided by her father, who left school at fourteen but with commitment and persistence became a solicitor and sole practitioner, the encouragement of her husband and partner at important moments, or the all day child care her children received from a ‘wonderful woman’, Conroy was conscious of the importance of support networks you could rely on, as well as the importance of trying to maintain ‘work/life balance’, before the phrase was even coined.

After fourteen years in Mount Isa, the Conroys moved to Gympie to practise, where Patricia continued to work for community organisations concerned with the welfare of women and children. In 1985 they moved to Brisbane where she and Martin established Conroy and Associates in Toowong, and where they practised until retirement. Patricia was a member of the Council of the Queensland Law Society from 1996 – 2004, serving as a member of the Professional Standards committee for some years. She was invited to serve on the boards of energy providers, SEQEB and Powerlink, experiences that she found challenging and inspirational as they brought her in touch with outstanding people. She was a founding member of the Queensland Women Lawyers Association.

If Patricia Conroy didn’t coin the phrase ‘women can have it all, but not all at once’, she certainly endorsed its truth by example! ‘The goals I set for myself,’ she says, ‘were to achieve a balanced life, to have a happy marriage and be a reasonable mother and at the same time have a rewarding professional life.’ By any measure, including her own, she achieved those goals and made an important contribution to the legal profession, and community life in Queensland.

Published resources

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

Archival resources

National Library of Australia, Oral History and Folklore Collection
Patricia Conroy interviewed by Nikki Henningham in the Trailblazing women and the law oral history project

Author Details
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Created 9 May 2016
Last modified 27 February 2025