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Pritchard, Janine

Occupation Judge, Lawyer

Summary

The Hon. Justice Janine Pritchard was appointed to the Supreme Court of Western Australia on 11 June 2010. She was elevated to this position after a year as a Judge of the District Court of Western Australia, during which period she served as Deputy President of the State Administrative Tribunal. Prior to her appointment to the District Court, Justice Pritchard had worked in the WA Crown (now State) Solicitor's Office (since 1991).

Known for her powerful intellect and work ethic, Justice Pritchard has been an important role model for women planning to combine a career in law, and in the judiciary in particular, with family responsibilities. Her first child was present at her swearing in ceremony; her second was born after her appointment. While she acknowledges the challenges of maintaining a demanding career with a 'hands on' approach to family life, Justice Pritchard has demonstrated that working arrangements for the judiciary are capable of accommodating family friendly policies, such as maternity leave.

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

Details

Born in Gunnedah in New South Wales, Janine Pritchard lived in regional NSW for the first fifteen years of her life. The oldest of three sisters educated by the Catholic Sisters of Mercy, Pritchard finished her secondary education at Merici College in Canberra, after her parents made the decision to move to that city to advance their daughters' education.

Pritchard went on to complete a combined Arts/Law degree at the Australian National University, graduating with a BA in 1990 and with a Law degree with honours in 1993. Her last two years of her law studies were completed while working full time, because in 1991 she moved to Perth to take up a position as a professional assistant to the then WA Solicitor-General, Kevin Parker AC, QC. She was admitted as a Barrister and Solicitor of the Supreme Court of Western Australia in 1993. She undertook more formal education in the late 1990s, completing a Graduate Diploma in Women's Studies at Murdoch University in 1997 and a Master of Laws with distinction from the University of London in 1999.

Having completed her articles with the then Crown Solicitor's Office, Pritchard remained in that office as a lawyer and in 2002 was appointed a Senior Assistant State Counsel. She had a very busy practice throughout this period but still found time to lecture and tutor in law at various universities in Perth. Her commitment to mentoring and supporting young lawyers is renowned, as is her active participation in organisations focussed on the advancement of women in the legal profession, including service as a board member of Australian Women Lawyers, the peak body for women lawyers' associations around Australia, and as a Committee member for Women Lawyers Western Australia (WLWA). From 2012 – 2014, she was Chair of the Steering Committee for WLWA's 20th Anniversary Review of the 1994 Chief Justice's Gender Bias Taskforce Report.

At her swearing in ceremony on 14 June 2010, the then Parliamentary Secretary to the WA Attorney General, Michael Mischin, listed Pritchard's many achievements, commitments and responsibilities, observing that ' [f]rankly, I don't know where you find the time!' There have been occasions when Her Honour has wondered this herself. Her motivation for pushing through her gruelling schedule stems partly from a desire to create better structures that promote gender equity throughout the legal system, allowing young boys and girls to imagine women and men in leadership roles, in equal numbers. The following extract of her own address at her swearing in, quoted at length, reflects her concerns.

I am also conscious that regrettably it remains the case that there is something slightly out of the ordinary about the appointment of a woman Judge, and in my case the appointment of a comparatively young woman. While I think that the appointment of women to Courts and Tribunals is generally well received within the profession itself, in the broader community it is interesting that it remains something unusual or worthy of comment.

Three things have brought this home to me in the past year. The first is that when I was appointed, one of my friends who is a lawyer and who is married to a lawyer recounted that her son who was about six years of age at the time had told her that I couldn't possibly have been appointed as a Judge "because girls can't be Judges".

[M]y son, came home very confused because the tennis coach who goes to his day-care centre to teach tennis had asked the kids what their parents do. He dutifully responded that "Mummy is a Judge and Daddy is a lawyer", only to be told, "No, darling. I think you must be wrong. Daddy's the Judge and Mummy's the lawyer."

More recently I was bemused to see that my appointment to this Court warranted media attention, not because it increased the number of women represented on the Court or for anything to do with my individual merits but because I have a husband with a senior position in the legal profession and [that was seen to raise the question of] how I would be able to manage my new position in view of my 'hubby's' role – that was the term used. My 'hubby's' role was apparently a matter of some concern.

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
Janine Pritchard interviewed by Nikki Henningham in the Trailblazing women and the law oral history project

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Digital resources



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