Entry type: Person
Entry ID: AWE5753

O’Sullivan, Helen

(1948 -)

Born	19480101, Toowoomba Queensland Australia
Occupation	Barrister, Judge, Lawyer

Summary

Her Honour Helen O’Sullivan is a retired judge of the Queensland District Court. She began her career as a Junior Clerk in Toowoomba, prior to returning to school and graduating from a Bachelor of Commerce degree.

Following her practice as a Senior Accountant in Perth, O’Sullivan graduated from a part-time Law degree and began practice as a Solicitor in Brisbane. In 1981, she was appointed Director of Continuing Legal Education at the Queensland Law Society, after which she commenced practice as a Barrister at the private bar.

Her Honour was appointed to the District Court bench in 1991 and retired at the end of 2009. She famously declared herself ‘an unapologetic feminist’ at her swearing-in ceremony on 9 April 1991. The official published transcript of proceedings deleted the word ‘unapologetic’ – reminding us that the Queensland bench was one of society’s most conservative bastions. Originally reluctant to accept a judicial appointment, O’Sullivan eventually agreed, believing it to be the best pathway with potential to change the system.

O’Sullivan was committed to a variety of pro bono and community causes. Before accepting her judicial appointment, she acted as a duty lawyer for Legal Aid and as a volunteer at the Caxton Street Legal Service. She was a foundation member of the Women’s Legal Service and volunteer lawyer there for some years. With Di Fingleton, she was the co-founder of the Financial Counselling Service.

Published resources

Book Section
Helen O'Sullivan, Kellie, Deborah, 2005

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

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