Entry type: Person
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Clarke, Gay

Occupation Academic, Advisor, Barrister, Lawyer

Summary

Gay Clarke (then Walker) was crowned Miss Queensland then Miss Australia in 1972. She went on to study law and was admitted as a Barrister of the Supreme Court of Queensland in 1982. She specialised in the area of Alternative Dispute Resolution and was a legal academic at the Queensland University of Technology for 20 years.

Details

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

I was born in Brisbane in 1951, the youngest of four children and the only daughter.

Fortunately for me my parents wanted all four of us to be well educated as they had both grown up in the country and had been denied that opportunity. My parents were insistent that I should be given the same educational advantages as my brothers which was quite unusual in those days. A lot of girls finished school in grade 10 and trained in secretarial work.

I went to St Margaret's Anglican Girls School for 5 years of high school and was fortunate to win a full fees scholarship after the end of grade 8 based on my grades for that year. My father was delighted as it eased the financial burden on the family. I was made a Prefect and House Captain in my final year and won a Commonwealth Scholarship to go to University.

It was not the norm for girls to go to University in the 1960s. My plan at that stage of my life was to be a school teacher and at no time did I consider law as a possibility for study. it was never even suggested as an option by school counsellors, teachers or family.

I enrolled in a Bachelor of Arts degree at the University of Queensland in 1969 – the first person in my family to ever go to University.

I studied English literature, History, French and Economics. The campus was much smaller in those days and I was delighted to have such luminaries as Geoffrey Rush and the late Bille Brown in some of my English classes.

I graduated with my Arts degree in 1972, but in that same year I became Miss Queensland and then Miss Australia. To put this into context this was the 'old' Miss Australia Quest which ran from 1954 to 2000 and was the chief fundraising activity for the Australian Cerebral Palsy Association. Over that period the Quest raised over $90 million dollars for children with cerebral palsy. There were no swimsuits at any stage, and when I look back on past winners we were all the girl next door – not models. However, as women's rights and roles in society changed the Quest was rightly terminated in the year 2000. It was however a year when my shyness evaporated and I became an expert public speaker. In retrospect it was good training for my future career path.

After that frenetic year my life changed direction when I married a Brisbane lawyer and my daughter Samantha was born. Sadly the marriage ended in divorce, but I had enrolled in the Bachelor of Laws Degree at what was then the Queensland Institute of Technology (QIT), now the Queensland University of Technology (QUT) in 1977 which was its inaugural year.

My main role model at the time was Quentin Bryce (now Dame Quentin Bryce) who was then a tutor in law at the University of Queensland. She was often featured in newspaper articles and she made a career in law, particularly academia, seem a possibility.

After a divorce, suddenly I was a single parent and had to become independent both financially and emotionally. With my parents support I chose to continue my law studies, so I moved back home with my baby daughter for the four years that it took to complete my degree.

In 1982 I graduated with 1st Class Honours and the Law Medal.

After graduation I was offered a job at QIT as a law tutor and I was admitted as a Barrister of the Supreme Court of Queensland at the end of 1982.

My career developed as I taught in the areas of Contract Law, Company Law and Succession Law.

In 1988 I was appointed a member of the Queensland State Government Domestic Violence Taskforce which resulted in a report ‘Beyond These Walls’ being published. This was a confronting experience, as domestic violence, although acknowledged was swept under the carpet in those days. Sadly this is an ongoing area where community and legal support is continuously needed.

My career developed as I was promoted to Lecturer in Law and then to Senior Lecturer. I also had part time appointments to the Austudy Review Tribunal and the Social Security Review Tribunal during these years.

After studying at night I obtained a Master of Laws Degree from the University of Queensland in 1990.

The most satisfying phase of my career began when I became interested in the area of Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) in the early 1990s. This was quite revolutionary at the time, the idea of resolving disputes through Mediation rather than going to Court.

The best courses available in this area at that period were at Bond University and I was fortunate, along with a colleague, Lyla Davies, to get support from the Dean for a years study leave to complete both practical and theoretical instruction at Bond University.

We followed up this training with a course in Negotiation at Harvard University in the USA under the instruction of Professor Roger Fisher in 1993 and I completed a second Masters Degree in Law from Bond University in 1996 specialising in Alternative Dispute Resolution.

This training gave my colleague and I the ability to set up a new Masters subject at QUT teaching ADR Mediation and we also developed and established a 3 day Mediation Skills Training course which was accredited by the Queensland Law Society. We offered this training to practicing Solicitors and Barristers under the Law Faculty Professional Legal Training program.

We could not have foreseen it at the time but these courses ran for another 20 years until my retirement, and in that time we trained practising lawyers, engineers, doctors, Principals and Deputy Principals of the Catholic Education system, members of the Family Court in Sydney, Sugar Millers from North Queensland, staff from the State Ombudsman’s Office, and people working in the Building and Construction Industry amongst others. This work got us out of the law school and into the broader community and was totally rewarding. Eventually Mediation was integrated into the Court processes resulting in a change in legal culture and approaches to resolving disputes.

As a result of my involvement in the area of ADR I was appointed as a member of the then ADR Council of the Queensland Department of Justice and to the ADR Committee of the Queensland Law Society.

In 1992 I was awarded a QUT Distinguished Academic Service Award for ‘outstanding teaching performance and leadership in the Faculty of Law’ and in 1994 was promoted to Associate Professor and Director of Teaching and Learning in the Law Faculty. I was one of the first women to be promoted into the Professorial levels in Law and I am delighted now in my retirement to see so many women Professors of Law in Faculties throughout Australia.

In 1995 I was appointed by the Commonwealth Attorney General for a three year term as a member of the National Alternative Dispute Resolution Advisory Council (NADRAC). This was an independent non-statutory body that provided expert policy advice to the Commonwealth Attorney-General on the development of ADR and the promotion of the use of alternative dispute resolution.

Another Queensland appointee to NADRAC was Quentin Bryce, so I finally got to meet my role model.

I continued my full time career at QUT for a total of 20 years. However, after having to care for elderly parents for a number of years and marrying my husband Barry Page in 2002 I decided to ease into part time work. I continued with part time lecturing as well as running the Mediation Skills Training courses for a further decade. This was a very satisfying way to end my legal career as well as giving me some valued family time.

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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Gay Clarke

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Digital resources



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