

**Entry type:** Resource  
**Entry ID:** AWH002766

## Valerie French interviewed by Kim Rubenstein in the Trailblazing women and the law pilot oral history project [sound recording]

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**Repository** National Library of Australia, Oral History and Folklore Collection

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**Reference** [ORAL TRC 6230/1](#)

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**Date Range** 24-May-10 - 24-May-10

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**Access** Access open for research, personal copies and public use.

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**Finding Aid** Timed summary (4 p.) and uncorrected transcript (typescript, 108 leaves)

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### Details

3 sound files (ca. 460 min.)??Valerie French, born in Sydney speaks about her family background; her schooling; moving to Western Australia; her father's professional life; attending Loreto College; religious upbringing and education; moving to Princeton, U.S.A. for a year, travel from Freemantle to New York; cultural, social and intellectual life in Princeton; return to Perth and schooling; attitudes of teachers at Loreto College to women's education and impact on personal identity; her choice of career, attending University of Western Australia, studying Law; gendered aspects of law school in 1950s and 1960s; class division at law school and anti-Catholic sentiments; initiation into law student society; change in social attitudes at law school, growth of social justice focus during 1960s-1970s; impact of gender discrimination on female law students; female teachers at law school; female lawyers in practice at the time in Australia; Labor party and socialism, her involvement with ALP at university; her decision to practice law; gendered aspects of legal practice; the transition from articled clerkship to legal practice, early career as solicitor; her decision to go to the bar; her experience as first woman at Western Australian Bar; her marriage to Robert French; the decision to leave Bar to work as a solicitor part-time; her reappointment as Legal Chairman, Social Security Appeals Tribunal; her appointment as Children's Court Magistrate, returning to full-time work and return to the Bar.??French discusses balancing of parental responsibilities and work; acceptance of a position at Blake Dawson Waldron, the culture of national law firms; working as a stipendiary Magistrate in Magistrate's Court in Western Australia for 3.5-4 years, the wide variety of matters that come before Magistrate's Court; working as a Mining Warden for approx. 2 years; Robert French's appointment to National Native Title Tribunal in 1994, decision to stop acting as a Mining Warden for conflict of interest reasons; balancing work and family during employment as Magistrate, gender balance and relations with other women lawyers while at Magistrate's Court of Australia, women lawyers appearing before the Magistrate's Court of Western Australia; appointment to District Court of Western Australia in November 1994, other women judges at District Court; her appointment to President of the Children's Court in Western Australia toward the end of 1994, reforms to Children's Court c.1990; impact of work of Children's Court on family life; return to District Court of Western Australia, appointment as Chair of Parole Board in early 2006 (later renamed Prisoners Review Board); gender and race in imprisonment and parole; Chairman of Mentally Impaired Accused Review Board; her decision to retire: the appointment of Robert French as Chief Justice of High Court of Australia; transition to retirement; additional roles during professional life; an overview of impact of gender/femaleness on professional life or career.

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**Created** 12 September 2014

**Last modified** 22 December 2017