

The Australian Women's Register

Entry type: Person

Entry ID: AWE5617

Blumer, Nooraini

(1962 -)

Born 8 January, 1962, Malacca Malaysia

Occupation Civil Libertarian, Director, Lawyer, Litigator, Solicitor

Summary

Women's advocate and civil libertarian Nooraini (Noor) Blumer (Dip Law (LPAB) LLM, GAICD) is a Director at Blumer's Personal Injuries Lawyers. She has served as President of Australian Women Lawyers (2005-2006), Chair of the Equalising Opportunities in the Law Committee of the Law Council of Australia (2007-2010) and President of the Law (2011-2012). She has also served as Vice-President of Civil Liberties Australia.

Go to 'Details' below to read a reflective essay written by Noor Blumer for the Trailblazing Women and the Law Project.

Details

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

I was born in Malacca in 1962 to a Malay father and my mother Dianne who had grown up in Perth.

The law played a part on my life even then. When I was 5 months old, my mother wanted to leave Malaysia without my father's knowledge and take me with her to Perth permanently. In those days, a child under the age of one did not need a separate passport and could travel on their mother's passport. Thus she was able to make the escape, which in recent years we have come to understand could be called an abduction, particularly under Malay law where the children are the property of the father.

I grew up happily in Perth but was usually the only Asian in my class. I used to forget I was Asian and get a shock when I saw myself in the mirror! I did well at school and my burning desire was to be a lawyer or a journalist.

I finished school at 16 and when I was 17 had my first child in 1979. I had the support of the father, who is still my husband, and I went to the University of WA with a view to studying law. In those days to gain entry to Law you had to pass first year Arts with suitable marks. I did this, but that year demand was high and the entrance marks requirement, which I had easily made, was raised and I missed out. I was devastated. I then embarked on second year Arts, but lacked enthusiasm.

My husband Mark came from Griffith NSW where his father was a lawyer and his father before him. Mark was not then a lawyer, but in 1982 we made the decision to go and live in Griffith, work for the family law firm as clerks and study the SAB by correspondence, now the LPAB.

I had trouble filling in the application to apply to become a 'student-at-law' as the form assumed that applicants would be male and a lot of 'Mr, he and his' had to be crossed out to accommodate me.

I didn't get to work as a law clerk, but eventually managed to get a job in the public service as an employment officer, which I enjoyed.

The study was very hard. In Griffith, we were 7 hours' drive from Sydney. There was no access to a law library and there was no internet. Fortunately, in those days, most solicitors firms had their own basic libraries. To qualify to sit the exams one had to complete a series of assignments. The exams were always 3 hours and closed book. This meant learning by rote the names of the 100 -150 cases necessary for each subject, a feat in itself, without also having to remember the relevant point they turned on.

The closest examination centre was about 4 hours away by car, so we often sat them in different locations. The first was in Broken Hill, a fantastic drive in 1982 just before the drought broke.

Lectures were held in Sydney, twice for each subject over a weekend. The SAB was easy to get into but notoriously hard to complete. I remember that the first lecture was held in a large lecture theatre at the University of Sydney; there would have been 200 students. Towards the end of the course I attended the family law lecture and it was just me and the lecturer, so we had a nice 'one to one'.

I continued to work full time and study and we had another 3 children along the way, as one does in the country! My progress was slow and I suffered more than a few failures along the way, mainly because the time I had to study was very limited and I did not have the luxury of aiming for fancy results. We were pretty poor at the time and we both needed to work full time. Also, I had real difficulty coping with subjects such as 'Practice and Procedure' with no experience working in a legal environment.

Another obstacle was attending the College of Law in St Leonards. I had to do it in 3 blocks of 4 and 6 weeks. This was difficult and expensive with a young family and the lecturers were notoriously un-family friendly- I could do a whole essay on that one! While the block course was supposed to be for the benefit of country students, it was really for the benefit of those working for fancy Sydney law firms who could turn up, leave at lunch time and go to work and get their billable hours.

I was finally admitted in 1992, just after the birth of our fourth child and I started the practice of law at Cater & Blumer in Griffith NSW.

I was so relieved to have finally finished I had not given the slightest thought as to what kind of law I wanted to practice. That decision was made for me as there was need for another litigation lawyer and that turned out well as I really loved it. At that time, I was the only female lawyer in Griffith, but the local lawyers were always supportive and helpful.

I remember sitting at the bar table one day when the magistrate came on the bench and said 'Good morning Gentlemen' He then looked at my sheepishly and apologised. I said, with bravado, that it was OK, I did like to think I was a gentleman in some respects.

In 1998 I became the first ever female partner of a law firm in the Riverina Law Society district. This was sufficiently noteworthy to warrant an article in the NSW Law Society journal, which came out, embarrassingly, just after Mark and I had decided to leave Griffith.

In late 1998 we moved to Canberra and I was branch manager of a plaintiff personal injury firm which Mark and I took over in 2000 and have operated ever since, Blumers Personal Injury Lawyers.

It was in Canberra that I became involved with the Women Lawyers Association of the ACT and served as President for several

years. Through that, I served on the board of Australian Women Lawyers (AWL) and was President in 2004/2005. What a wonderful journey that was for me, I still have good friends throughout Australia.

At that time AWL was pressing for a more formalised and transparent process for judicial appointments. Also, we were working on having a model equitable briefing policy for large firms and government. What a hoot it was to be talking to Attorneys General and Chief Justices about such matters.

Also the AWL had instigated the first survey of appearances by gender in Australian courts, which was important in demonstrating that women barristers were not getting a fair share of the work in the higher courts and were mainly working in the lower courts with less lucrative work. Much time was spent with my fellow board members manually collating the thousands of check sheets that had been provided from all around Australia.

After the retirement of Justice Gaudron in 2003 there were no women on the High Court until the appointment of the Hon. Susan Crennan in 2005. It was a very difficult time as there were more women than men entering the profession, but no visible signs that a woman had a decent chance of achieving such an appointment. Fortunately that position has considerably improved with the subsequent appointments of Justices Kiefer, Bell and Gordon.

After my year as President of AWL, my family were concerned that with nothing to distract me I might become a nuisance to them, so at their urging I undertook a Master of Laws at ANU. It was a pleasure to finally be attending university in a normal way and to take subjects which interested me. When I first applied I was refused entry to the course because they 'did not recognize my qualifications'. This was a bit embarrassing, and would have been more so had they actually seen my transcript, but I wrote a letter pointing out my experience and there was no problem. I finished this in about 2008.

I also served for several years as Chair of the Equalising Opportunities in the Law, a standing committee of the Law Council of Australia (LCA). This involved further work in developing the Equitable Briefing Policy and conducting a professional survey of court appearances by agenda.

In 2011 I was elected President of the ACT Law Society, only the 2nd woman to hold that position. I served 2 years as President as well as a Director of the LCA and loved nearly every minute of it.

When I ran for President, my electioneering material had clearly stated that I was Vice-President of Civil Liberties Australia and that I was interested in human rights. What a joy it was to discover that when speaking as President of the ACT Law Society on legal issues, taking a civil liberties stance was seen as appropriate. While there may have been some murmurs, not one of our members ever took issue with that approach. I learned that lawyers mostly care deeply about such issues and appreciate it when their peak bodies are vocal in upholding and explaining the law.

There were so many issues in the past in the ACT where I had thought to myself, 'Well, no one ever asks me what I think about', but having the job of President put paid to that complaint. I was asked about everything and had real input into legal issues including proposed legislation and the work of the courts.

I continue to be a director of Blumers Lawyers with my husband Mark and the fun continues. As my colleague John Eades said to me in the Griffith Local Court 23 years ago, 'Noor, litigation, it's the only game for adults'. Working on cases continues to excite my interest and enthusiasm.

I strongly believe that both the public and the profession wants to have the law explained to them by lawyers, not by journalists. It is great to see that most professional conduct rules allow such public discussions to take place.

As well as personal injury litigation, I have been privileged to act for the ACT Human Rights commission from time – to – time and this has given me an insight into the application of a modern Human Rights Act.

The law is not for everyone, but I continue to derive pleasure from litigation, drafting pleadings, being privy to the lives of clients, which are rarely boring or ordinary. It is also a privilege to work with some great minds, grappling with problems and finding solutions to help everyday people. There is also the joy of running a business, having a wonderful staff and being constantly impressed by the knowledge, skill and enthusiasm of younger lawyers.

Published resources

Resource

Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

Site Exhibition

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

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