

# Having it all

JACKY CAMPBELL, DECEMBER 2013

## **Having it All**

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**Portia, 2013**

Each generation of women faces different challenges with careers and family. I believe the generation before mine faced greater ones than I did. Bizarrely, I also believe the current generation of female law graduates face greater challenges than me.

I was born in 1961, the last Baby Boomer year. Older Baby Boomers and the pre-war generation were the real trail blazers. Female lawyers were an extremely small minority. They faced open discrimination on the basis of gender, and often had to choose between having a career and having a family. Women usually did not have the opportunity to attend university, let alone dream of becoming Prime Minister, the Governor General or the Chief of Justice of the Supreme Court of Victoria. My generation was told that we should have those dreams.

I was fortunate to have parents who expected me to attend university. They expected me to be able to "have it all". I was also fortunate to attend university in the heady post-Whitlam years when university education was free. My parents encouraged me to explore professions other than teaching and nursing, which were seen as the main options by many of my school class-mates.

At university I met other women who believed they could have both a career and a family. Some of us were fortunate to have partners who believed it too. For example, my husband has done his fair share of looking after sick children. We often split the day and each spent half a day in the office and half a day working from home with the sick child. Later, I discovered the benefit of having a large office so a sick child could sit in a comfortable chair with a book when they weren't watching DVDs in the boardroom.

I was wary of studying family law at university as I had heard that women were often stereotyped and placed in family law departments because they were female. In retrospect, I realise that whether or not I studied family law was irrelevant to prospective employers. In any event, I now say that I stereotyped myself, did my Masters in Family Law to catch up and have practised solely in the area of family law for over 20 years.

Despite my expectations, acquired through the media and at university, to encounter gender discrimination in the workplace, it was not until my fifth professional job that I was aware of being treated differently because I was female. I did my Articles in a small country firm and was encouraged by my principal, Clem D'Alessandro and the female lawyers. I was welcomed into a bookclub and the local community. Later, I worked in a suburban practice, Purcell Balfe & Webb, where the supervision and encouragement I

received as a lawyer and a person, particularly from Tony Balfe, was fantastic. In none of my early jobs did I perceive that I was judged other than on merit.

It was in a mid-tier city firm that I finally encountered gender prejudice. It was a shock. I was not "one of the boys", was treated differently and socially excluded - not by the partners but by male colleagues. Also, I think the commercial "boys" considered that family law wasn't real law. They were unaware of the depth of commercial knowledge family lawyers required.

My next move was to Aitken Walker & Strachan which had a long history of ethical and quality practice, and well-regarded senior practitioners such as Phillip and Bob Aitken and Robert Davey. I was there 12 years and was again treated as a lawyer first and a female second. Allowances were made for me whilst I was pregnant and had children, allowances for which I will be forever grateful. It seemed an accident of history for me to be their first female equity partner.

Looking back, most of my in-house mentors have been male. However, I have also been supported and encouraged by male and female lawyers in the broader family law community in my career and personal challenges, including setting up a specialist family law firm, Forte Family Lawyers. One of these supportive colleagues, Caroline Counsel, is also writing in this journal.

When I was pregnant with my first child I started writing for CCH to help me stay up to date with the law whilst I was home with a baby. Fifteen years down the track I am still writing for CCH and have developed close personal relationships with the various female editors there, sharing the highs and lows of juggling work and family commitments.

I tried part-time work but found it difficult to deal with a baby, faxes, emails and phone calls on both the land line and mobile as well as trying to type my own letters. Too much technology demanded my attention at the same time and I missed the convenience and filtering roles of my PA and a receptionist. I was confident with the choice of a city-based crèche which encouraged parents to drop in. Later, a string of well-adjusted university students helped with after-school care and provided good role models for my children.

Although I have almost always worked full-time, I have managed to attend day time class concerts, help with reading in my son's classroom, help with maths in my daughter's classroom, attend daytime school functions and be a parents' class representative. In exchange for this flexibility, work often leaks into evenings and weekends.

I have more than 4 weeks of holidays per year, but in exchange for this, I work during holidays. In part, this is to avoid the extra work involved in doing long memos on my

files, but it also means that I am available to answer emailed queries from junior lawyers and not leave all the burden of managing the practice to my partner. In part, it's because, unlike a file, reading and writing about the law doesn't have an end point. The only holiday when I didn't work, not even my beloved CCH writing, was when we holidayed in the United States, seeing the Grand Canyon, Disney World and the Wizarding World of Harry Potter. This break was not for a lack of trying, but the time difference and IT issues completely defeated me.

My children roll their eyes at my Blackberry addiction and my recently acquired glued on i-Pad. However, they give me freedom to work at odd times so I can be available for my children during working hours and not always be in the office next to a fixed phone line. I know what's happening before I enter the office after a school commitment rather than have the stress of several bombs exploding the minute I return. I can consider the legal issues, start drafting in my head and even handwrite or type a response. I feel I have more control. By contrast, my children believe my Blackberry controls me. They don't want me to check my emails out of the office at all.

This brings me to the generation of recent graduates. They tell me that they don't want my life - they think it's hectic and stressful. Maybe it is, but I don't know what I would change. I have a challenging and interesting career, am a partner in a successful legal practice, have a fantastic partner at Forte Family Lawyers in Wendy Kayler-Thomson, a supportive husband and two wonderful teenage children. Through writing for CCH I am able to combine my love of learning with maintaining my professional profile. If I had to press the "delete" key, what do I remove?

My generation didn't want the lives of our parents and our parents didn't want the lives of their parents. But whatever the current generation does, like me, they will be criticised by others for their choices by people who made different choices.

My generation seems marked as a generation where many career women kept their maiden names when they married (they also didn't have to change them back when they divorced) and use the title "Ms". From my observations, the current generation of graduates seems determined to move from "Miss" to "Mrs" when they marry and change their surnames at that time too. The title "Ms", adopted by me and my university friends when we were aged 17 or 18, meant that we, like men, did not go through life identified as single or married. I have been told that this title now dates us. Some recent graduates think "Ms" is for old people and "Miss" means they are young. Do they also think their marriages are more likely to be successful if they have their husband's surname?

I worry about the current generation of law graduates (and my children). I hope they will believe they can "have it all", if that is what they want. If they don't want to, that is

their choice, and I hope they don't encounter too much criticism for choosing either family or career. Whatever they decide, I hope, like me, when they reach their 50's, they embrace the decisions they made about how they lived their lives. They may have some regrets - we all do - but for me they are not major ones. I hope they don't want to press the "delete" key, or even worse, press "re-wind".