

## **Woman Lawyer of the Year 40<sup>th</sup> Annual Gala Awards Dinner**

### **Leneen Ford AC Woman Lawyer of the Year - 2018**

Thank you to the judges and to the sponsors – it's particularly lovely to receive an award sponsored by my alma mater – The University of Queensland – a place where I now teach and indeed, am still taught.

Congratulations to the other finalists and to the Emergent and Regional Winners.

I am humbled and thrilled by this award.

I would like to thank a few women who are here with me tonight and who have nominated me for, and supported me in, this award. First of all my mother, whose name, confusingly, is Dorte. Yes, my mother, Dorte. I am Dorte's daughter. She is everything a Danish Viking should be. Brave, beautiful, strong and willing to frock up at a moment's notice.

Erin Shaw, Clarissa Rayward and Ann-Maree David. All totally amazing women. To know that I have in some small way encouraged and inspired you is a gift in itself. And I am glad I didn't have to die before you wrote such nice things about me!

Also here with me tonight are Barristers, Clarla Klease and Paula Morreau. In 2002 we were the finalists in the Emergent Woman Lawyer of the Year Award. And so to tonight's young finalists I say: we are what 16 years and 7 children will do to you. That we are all still in this game and able to be here together tonight means a great deal and says much.

But ladies and gentlemen, I have a confession to make.

I am tired.

I am tired because I am 44 years old, self employed and the mother of two primary school aged children. Tired goes with the territory.

I am tired because as well as being a mother I am a wife, a daughter, a sister, a friend, a colleague, a mentor, a teacher, a contributor to my personal and professional communities and I take those opportunities seriously and I give them my all.

I am tired because I am a lawyer and the law is a jealous mistress.

But most of all I am tired from 20 years of doing a job through a prism that is inconsistent with who I am. A lens that I find fundamentally one dimensional and inherently aggressive. It is inherently masculine. The way the law is, largely, practised invites lawyers to solve problems by first making them bigger and by then aggressively holding a position until a decision is imposed or a compromised based on brinkmanship is reached.

I don't naturally think like that but I have been taught that that's how my job is done. And I have learned how to excel at it. But I am tired.

I am exhausted from walking that walk.

It affects who I am.

It dims my light.

And looking around this room I know I am not the only one who feels it.

But it also affects those who are NOT in this room tonight. The women who have left the profession. Not having retired after a full and fulfilling career but who have opted out. Early.

I get it: law was historically a man's domain and the pace of cultural change is indeed glacial. But ladies, at least as graduates and junior lawyers we have been here, en masse, for decades. But we are not here in numbers in the roles that require longer service. We know that. We drop out for many reasons – not least because we become tired. I think that has much to do with the fact that law, business, sport, family lives STILL operate so much through a lens that is not ours. Its not even equal, which would be better still.

I used to think, in my moments of tired, exhausted overwhelm, that my role in the profession didn't matter. That I am not a trail blazer like Leneen Ford, Agnes McWhinney or Margaret McMurdo. That the doors for women's entry to the law were now wide open and no one would care if raised the white flag and opted out to run the school's second hand clothing shop.

But I can see now that I (and the women of my generation – the Carla Kleases, Paula Morreaus Genevieve Dees, Clarissa Raywards) matter just as much as those upon whose shoulders we stand. The responsibility for the change to make professional life sustainable for women, is mine. It's ours. The responsibility to stop pretending that a flourishing legal career and committed parenting (or other) role is at all easy, realistic, healthy or sustainable, is mine. It's ours.

We lie loudest when we lie to ourselves.

But worse, I think, we lie to the generations to come. To the women AND men who will benefit from the opportunity to enjoy a deeply thoughtful, multidimensional professional life.

The time to think about, and then work out, how to practice as a problem solver not a gladiator is upon us. And it's so terribly exciting that it makes me forget about the tired.

We all know that Ginger Rogers did everything Fred Astaire did, but that she did it backwards and in high heels. But puzzle me this: what might have happened if Ginger Rogers had been invited to turn around?

AMR

27 October 2018