

Archive No. 63

Ariel Couchman (7 July 1958 -)

I grew up in Ferntree Gully, Victoria, and attended local primary and high schools and then Presbyterian Ladies College. I completed Arts and Law Degrees at Monash University in 1984 and was involved in University politics including AUS and the Monash University feminist collective

During my university years I was also involved in the Melbourne Women's Liberation House (Moor St, Rosslyn St, Victoria St) and Women Against Rape.

On completing university I was employed part-time by the Women's Legal Resource Group to assist with their campaign work.

I completed Articles at a criminal law firm Grace and MacGregor. On applying to be admitted (1987) to practice law was told that I could not be admitted as a Ms. I successfully challenged this in the Supreme Court, represented by solicitor Sue MacGregor . On admission to the law in 1987 I and Meredith Carter wore pants challenging a prevailing view in the courts at the time that women should not wear pants in court. There was extensive coverage of this action in domestic and international media.

I was employed as the first legal officer for the Domestic Violence Incest Resource Centre. This position monitored and commented publicly on the first Crimes Family Violence Act in Victoria. This Act introduced intervention order a civil/quasi criminal order. There was much debate in the women's movement in the lead up to the introduction of IVOs, those against arguing that domestic violence needed to be treated as a crime.

During my employment at DVIRC I received a call from a psychologist at Pentridge jail about 2 young women who had been jailed for perjury. They had been sexually abused by their father and after pressure was put onto them by their father's lawyer (Galbally) they went to the police station and told police they had lied. This case was taken up by DVIRC and many women in the

legal profession (including judges and barristers) and was known as the 'Collis sisters campaign'.

During this employment I was also involved with the Coalition Against Family Violence and we initiated a public campaign to highlight the number of women who had been killed by their partners. We later researched and wrote a book titled Blood on Whose Hands (published by Federation Press) that documented a number of cases based on interviews with family members such as Phil Cleary who went on to campaign for law reform to the defence of provocation.

Collectives and activities I was involved in:

Women Against Rape (early 80s)

Women's Liberation Halfway House (early 80s) (including contributions to the newsletter and lobbying for a refuge referral service.

Prostitutes Collective of Victoria (80s)

Coalition Against Family Violence (80s)

Domestic Violence Incest Resource Collective (90s)

Currently (2011) I am Director of the Young People's Legal Rights Centre (Melbourne) and a part-time family law mediator .