

Eve Rannells - Obituary

Jacqueline Elliott

High Court of Australia

Eve Rannells, who retired in January 1998 after 10 years as Law Librarian at the University of Papua New Guinea (UPNG), died on Wednesday, 7 November 2001, in a hospital at St Helena, California. Sadly, Eve developed complications after a gall bladder operation on 19 October. She was in intensive care when the doctors and Jack, her husband, made the decision to withdraw the life support systems that had kept her alive for 19 days.

I first remember Eve around 1984 when she appeared in the law library at UPNG and just stood in the stacks of the law collection. Eve was a small thin person who was wearing a spacious kaftan at the time, and she just stood there, gazing at our books. I wondered who was this strange American? Then she explained that she used to be a law librarian and she missed the law books. She had come to soak in the feeling of the familiar tomes. Eve had recently arrived in Papua New Guinea and was working in the National Library. She really wanted to work in law again, and later on, when she became law librarian at UPNG, she was in her element.

Eve was an inspiration to many and a mentor to all who worked with her, be they librarians, academics or students. Miriam Walo, who recently attended the Melbourne conference, learned everything about law librarianship from Eve. Jack and Eve kept in close touch with their PNG friends and Eve, who wrote a reference for Miriam to be sponsored to the Melbourne conference, was aware that she had been successful in her application to attend. She would have been particularly happy about the opportunity afforded Miriam by the work placement Eve did everything to further the careers of her PNG staff – they were like family to her. Jack says that ‘Eve had a varied and good life’ and that the 14 years as a librarian in PNG ‘unquestionably were the high point’.

Eve spread cheer and goodwill wherever she went, and even in adversity she never gave up. She was mugged once by a raskal near the front entrance to the National Library in Port Moresby. It was a cowardly attack on a small, lightweight, and not exactly youthful person, but Eve was not going to let go of her bag. She hung on determinedly, and was dragged for many yards on the hard ground before being forced to give way. The incident shook her somewhat and left its legacy, but she eventually recovered and continued on as usual.

Eric Kwa, Dean of the Faculty of Law at UPNG, summed up the feeling in the Law School when he said: 'Eve has been a real darling to all of us here at the Law School. She was a real Papua New Guinean at heart'. The memory of Eve's energy and enthusiasm will not soon be forgotten by those she inspired, but happily her legacy will live on in what those people achieve. Eve had a wonderful life. She died peacefully. We are thankful for that, but she will be so sadly missed by many of us. Our sincere sympathy goes to Jack and her family.

Vale, Eve, rest in peace.