

Ainslie-Wallace J said in a sense it was as though she was coming home:

In the early months of 1979 I made my first ever court appearance here in the Family Court. It was a very difficult adjournment by consent, and I liked the work and I forged quite a career for myself in consent adjournments. I made many more appearances and before I knew what had happened twenty years had passed, as had the flower of my youth.

And in 1997 I accepted an appointment to the District Court and I'm sad to be leaving it. The work and its variety has been endlessly stimulating and challenging and it's an extraordinarily busy court. It has achieved an enviable reputation for efficiency, thanks to the hard work and dedication of the judges of the court, who work prodigiously under the stewardship of the chief judge, Justice Reg Blanch. He has been an inspirational chief judge and I hold great affection for him, and I'll miss him.

I suspect he will have much more time on his hands now that he's not dealing with my endless requests for leave. He may even take up a hobby...

My formative years as a lawyer were spent here, much of it in the company of Justice Ryan, Mrs Rees and Gay O'Connor. Those of you who know them will agree with me that they are formidable women, highly professional and effective lawyers and they are very dear friends. On one occasion the late great Joe Goldstein came upon Anne, Judy and myself in a conference room and commented – I'm giving you the edited version, you will understand – that it looked like the first act from Macbeth.

He may be gone but the analogy lives on, because just a week ago an old friend, seeing the three of us in what he described as a conspiratorial huddle, stirred an imaginary cauldron.

The Hon Justice William Johnston and the Hon Justice Ian Loughnan

Judicial Registrars William Johnston and Ian Loughnan were sworn in as judges of the Family Court of Australia on 12 July 2010.

Toni Peroni spoke on behalf of the Australian Government. Robert Lethbridge SC spoke on behalf of the New South Wales and Australian bar associations. Amanda Parkin spoke on behalf of the Law Council of Australia and the Family Law Section. Justin Dowd spoke on behalf of the solicitors of New South Wales. Their honours responded to the speeches.

Johnston J was admitted as a solicitor of the Supreme Court of the Australian Capital Territory in 1972 and practised as a solicitor in regional New South Wales, then was an officer of the Commonwealth Attorney-Generals Department in Canberra between 1973 and 1980. During this period, his Honour advised the then attorney-general on the administration of family law legislation, and was also involved in other high-profile law reforms, including Australia's first counter-terrorism legislation, and preliminary work in relation to the Hague Child Abduction Convention.

His Honour was appointed deputy registrar of the Family Court of Australia in 1980, and in 1986, principal registrar he joined the Family Court in 1980 as a deputy registrar, becoming the court's principal registrar in 1986. In 1989 his Honour returned to private practice, at Barker Gosling solicitors, where he was responsible for the firm's family law practice, including numerous complex property matters. He was appointed a judicial registrar of the Family Court in 1990.

Loughnan J was admitted as a barrister of the Supreme Court of New South Wales in 1981 after obtaining a Diploma of Law from the Barristers Admission Board and in 1984 a Diploma in Criminology from the University of Sydney. He held a number of clerical and administrative positions up until 1982 in the Family Law Division of the Supreme Court of New South Wales and the Family Court of Australia.

From 1982 until 1984 he was deputy district registrar of the Federal Court of Australia; deputy registrar in bankruptcy, and deputy registrar of the Administrative Appeals Tribunal. He was appointed deputy registrar of the Family Court of Australia in 1984, and appointed principal registrar of the Family Court in 1991. In 1995 he was appointed judicial registrar of the Family Court in 1995. As a judicial registrar his Honour chaired the Future Directions Committee from 1998 to 2000, in addition to his judicial duties.

Lethbridge SC said that:

the consensus at the bar and particularly the Parramatta, Sydney and Newcastle Family Law Bars is that the appointments are overdue [and] having been made, they are welcomed and applauded; ...

May I just say a little about the duty lists which have comprised much of their Honour's work to date? The work in these lists exemplifies the qualities which we, at the Bar, believe each of their Honours will bring to the bench. The qualities, though not exclusively, comprise compassion, clarity of thought, a capacity for hard work, good humour and a good nose for nonsense. Duty lists are perhaps the most difficult area in the Court, because there is almost always too much work to be done in a day; there seems to be a high proportion of litigants in person; and while the Court's duty is to hear and determine disputes in duty lists, is almost always, in one of the party's interests, for nothing at all to happen.

Their Honours have assiduously dealt with their duty lists,

completed them and except where time has not permitted, brought sensible results in situations which are often extremely difficult and emotional. May I give one example of the humour that his Honour, Justice Loughnan, brings to the bench? It is reported that his Honour, in a duty list comprising some 20 or 30 matters, was calling through the list, when at matter two or three he was confronted by two litigants; one in person, the applicant, being an engineer, who set out to inform his Honour, in minute detail, of all aspects of the matter before the Court irrespective of their relevance as to what was to be done on the day. His Honour, despite several entreaties to the engineer to get to the point, was not able to bring him to a point, whereupon his Honour was heard to say:

Note to self: remember to ban self-represented engineers from my list in future.

Finally, there was silence. With silence came his Honour's request for the solicitor for the mother as to what it was that his client sought. There was an application, his Honour was told. His Honour, as is often the case in the duty list, was unable to find it because it hadn't come through the system. So, of course, he asked the mother's solicitor, could he provide a copy. There was much shuffling of paper. There was much talk, but there was no application. At which point, his Honour turned to the engineer and asked if he could help, whereupon a large file was produced and very quickly indeed, a pristine copy of the mother's application was also produced and handed up. His Honour was then heard to say:

Note to self: there are some advantages to having self-represented engineers before you.