



Interview with Justice Betty King

Name:

Betty June King.
Not Elizabeth, Betty. Born, christened, done, never been Elizabeth. I'm Betty.

Job title:

Justice of the Supreme Court of Victoria. That makes me The Hon Justice Betty King.

What do I call you? I've been debating it all day...

My name is Betty, and I have a view that off the bench that's who I am.

Area of practice?

Crime.

When were you appointed to the bench?

County Court 2000, Supreme Court 2005.

First legal job?

I finished articles and went straight to the bar. I didn't hesitate for half a millisecond.

Do you regret going so early?

Not at all. I encourage people to go when they are poor and don't have assets because in the first couple of years money is slow.

Would you encourage young lawyers to go straight to the bar?

If they have a real passion to be an advocate, then I would say go early and shine, although many people would disagree with me.

Years at the bar?

25.

Were you a prosecutor or defender?

Both. It's good to do both to get the balance.

Do you miss the bar?

I miss it. I'm sure I couldn't go back and do it now. I'm past that, I've lost that edge.

Biggest professional achievement to date?

Being appointed a Justice of the Supreme Court. If I said anything else I'd get shot.

How do you start your day?

I wake up, shower, get dressed, get in the car. Very efficient. I pick up my daughter Elizabeth and we go have breakfast together every day at the Swine (Essoign Club).

Do you only hear murder cases?

Almost always. Although I am doing a terrorist trial in the middle of the year.

How do you stay so upbeat given the content of your work?

There are some things that truly want to make you cry, but you can't do that because it doesn't fit with your role – in your job you have to be objective, independent and fair.

Have you ever shed a tear in court?

Not in court but quite a few outside. I think I'd shoot myself if I cried in court.

Recently I had to sentence a girl who has had an awful life filled with abuse. I had to discuss it with colleagues and vent my anger because I thought it was disgraceful that in our day and age in society we can let this happen to people.

You have to vent and let the anger and emotion go before you sentence. It can't be a knee-jerk reaction. At a later stage you can sit down and deal with it as a judge, with the anger gone. I need to impose a sentence that's fair to everyone.

People forget that judges are human beings. Apparently we are "out of touch".

So you read the *Herald Sun*?

I read all newspapers. I don't think you can afford to not read a paper that 80 per cent of the public reads, that my jurors read, because that would be elitist.

What do you think of judges being celebrities?

I am very opposed to that. But I am even more opposed to criminals becoming celebrities. Roberta Williams has done nothing except be married to a

criminal. Mick Gatto has become a celebrity for killing someone and being acquitted on the grounds of self-defence. How does that make someone a celebrity?

Are you sick of talking about Underbelly?

Underbelly will come with me forever because it was so notorious.

Did you like it?

I watched all 13 episodes, starting at 6pm, and delivered the judgment the next morning. I found it very entertaining and that's one reason it had to be banned as it had such an impact. It was a well-produced series. I didn't think the second one had anything on it.

You do not have a profile on Wikipedia – have you suppressed it?

I've had it removed. The Facebooks people create for me I've had removed as well. I'm not a celebrity, just a judge.

How does that reconcile with the interview you are giving now?

I don't give interviews. This is the first interview and that's because it's for young lawyers. I say no to interviews because who I am is absolutely irrelevant. You should feel really privileged.

What do you do when you are Betty (i.e. off the bench)?

I live with my mother, who's 85. We might watch telly together and that's about it.

Otherwise I go out with friends and be naughty. I often go out to dinner in Richmond because I can walk there. My favourite place is Boozy Rouge.

You are famous for your style – did you get many comments as a barrister?

I got thrown out of court once for wearing a pale green suit, pale green stockings and pale green shoes. The judge's associate told me that I needed to leave the court to buy flesh-coloured stockings!

Favourite lipstick?

One that doesn't come off because I'm lazy! I put it on once a day and never re-apply. I'm too busy.

I'm seriously obsessed with clothes, but not makeup. I love everything leopard and have done long before it was in fashion.

Where do you keep all your stylish possessions?

I have many wardrobes. I've just thrown out 40 pairs of shoes. Some of them were



BELIEVE IN YOURSELF AND WORK HARD. UNPREPARED IS THE WORST THING YOU CAN BE. AND DON'T FORGET TO SHINE.

magnificent. I had an operation and now I'm not allowed to wear heels over three inches, which causes me to cry a great deal.

Favourite store?

New York. I go to New York every year to shop and live.

Black or white?

Black. I'm from Melbourne!

Nail colour?

French-polish or red.

Favourite shoes?

Leopard print boots from Harlem. And a new pair that are leopard, gold, bronze, tiger and a little bit of black and white dalmatian. I found them on the net.

Sports?

No sport. Nothing healthy.

Memberships?

VRC. I take a week's leave every year and I host a famous car park in the nursery. It's gorgeous and fun and it's brilliant. It's a big party.

Is it hard to score an invitation to your car park?

No no, I'm a warm and generous person . . . provided that I like you.

Favourite TV show?

Boston Legal. Shirley is my real hero. She tells them exactly what she thinks.

Shirley is an awesome example of women succeeding in the law. Do you think it will ever get to the stage where there will be equality in the profession?

Not until women stop having babies.

Advice to young lawyers?

Believe in yourself and work hard. Unprepared is the worst thing you can be. And don't forget to shine. ●

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DON'T MISS JUSTICE BETTY KING, moderator of this year's legal comedy debate "The ideal client – innocent or guilty?" For more information check the inside cover of this *YLJ*.