

Profile One

Ann Sherry AO

by
Lucinda Holdforth

Ann Sherry was the first female CEO of a bank in New Zealand. Currently the CEO, Westpac New Zealand, and Group Executive, Westpac New Zealand and the Pacific, Ann is a former CEO of the Bank of Melbourne and First Assistant Secretary of the Office of the Status of Women in Canberra. Ann is a member of the Board of The New Zealand Institute and a member of the New Zealand Business Council for Sustainable Development. She was awarded a Centenary Medal in 2003 and an Order of Australia in 2004.

Ann Sherry's story will not appeal to people who like stereotypes. A career including prison welfare, the trade union movement and anti-discrimination policy is hardly a normal prelude to a stellar rise in the banking sector. A passion for social justice is not normally regarded as compatible with a drive for shareholder value.

Yet today Ann Sherry is routinely nominated as one of Australia's most influential business people. Ironically, her success now sees her reside in Auckland as CEO of the Westpac bank, New Zealand. Before this she was CEO of the Bank of Melbourne and Group Executive, People and Performance, in the Westpac Group. Sherry has shown not only that it is possible to reconcile the apparent opposites of a warm heart and a business head, she has been at the forefront in demonstrating that compassion and inclusion can actively contribute to a stronger corporate bottom line.

But it's not only Sherry's career path that confounds all conventional expectations. Her personal story is equally surprising.

Sherry was born in 1954, the eldest of three daughters in the Queensland country town of Gympie (about two hours drive north of Brisbane), where her parents owned the local pharmacy. "I think there was something about growing up in the country that was quite liberating," she recalls. "You grew up without a sense of fear or

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constraint. I learnt to ride — we'd bring our horse from the paddock and ride up the main street of the town into the yard of our house.”

Sherry spent her early school years at Gympie Central Primary. When asked if she had an early sense of ambition, Ann shakes her head as if in puzzlement at the very idea. Nor did she have a particularly strong sense of social justice. On the contrary, she was naughty, sociable, and outgoing. She read voraciously, but she was not scholarly. And her favourite things were holidays. “Once a year we would load up the car and do the Chevy Chase thing — we would do the car holiday. By the time I was in my early teens we'd travelled all over Australia — Cairns, skiing at Kosciusko, Melbourne. It gave me a fantastic sense of difference, of variability and space ... and place.”

When the time came for Sherry to attend high school the family moved from Gympie to Brisbane. Her parents bought a big pharmacy in the middle of town and Sherry went to Somerville House, a well-regarded private school for girls. Sherry remained outgoing, happy, bright, and lazy. And she might have stayed that way.

But then, things changed.

I was in year eight or nine at high school when they announced over the school system that we should stay away from the city because there's been a gas explosion on the corner of Queen and George Streets. That happened to be where my parents' pharmacy was. So of course I went roaring into town. And literally a whole section of the city had been damaged by an underground gas explosion.

Sherry's parents were unhurt, but several people had been injured. And the pharmacy itself, in which her parents had invested so much, had literally been destroyed. This ushered in a difficult period. Both parents became wage-earners to support the family. Sherry's father took a job as chief pharmacist at one of the public hospitals.

And that proved to be the least of the challenges at this time.

Sherry recounts the dramatic event quite simply. “When I was in Year 11, my mother got Ross River virus and ended up paralysed — a paraplegic.” Although she eventually recovered the use of her legs, Sherry's mother was in hospital for a long time and in a wheelchair for longer. At the age of 15, the free and easy eldest daughter became, of all things, the responsible woman of the house. She ran the home, organised the meals and looked after her two younger sisters. When asked how they responded to their elder sister's new authority, Ann is emphatic that whatever her younger sisters thought of her was quite beside the point: “I didn't care. I was mother.”

For a year, Sherry tested many of the limits — she skipped school lessons; she drove a car, although she was well under legal age. “I used to drive everyone around ... , if we needed to do some

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shopping we'd all get in the car and off we'd go. I'd drive. I loved it." Ann Sherry, respectable banker, laughs now at the memory of her younger, lawless self. "Dad didn't know ... one of the rules of illegally driving is you do NOT crash the car..."

When Sherry finished high school her primary goal was financial independence. "As soon as I finished school I wanted to get out ... which is why I did radiography." Quite simply, after those years of domestic upheaval and responsibility: "I was out of there!" But radiography was always an unlikely choice for the sociable Sherry. Her summation of the job says it all: "Meet nice people and watch too many of them die." Sherry says now, "It just wasn't for me".

It wasn't just the nature of the job that she objected to. This was the first time Sherry encountered a big, inefficient bureaucracy. It made a lasting impression on her.

The structure of the hospital drove me mental. The inequity of it! Inexperienced doctors would give us instructions that we thought were wrong. But we had no choice, because answering back was not part of the way hierarchies worked in hospitals. I railed against it. Virtually all the radiographers were women and all the doctors were men. So you could just see the ridiculousness of it, the lack of respect. I was angry.

After two years Sherry left radiography and went to study at the University of Queensland. She started off majoring in computer science and pure maths. Of computer science she recalls: "I spent the whole semester sticking holes in cards with a straightened paper clip thinking, *If this is the New Age, it's going to have to happen without me.*" But the economics class she took as an extra subject proved an eye-opener. "There was debate and intellectual stimulation. Suddenly I thought *Oh my god!* I discovered there was a whole other world out there which was fantastic."

Ann also discovered fellow student Michael Hogan. They married when she was just 20 years old. She still laughs with delight at the irony — for years she had declared that marriage was a complete constraint and she would never subject herself to it — yet she married younger than most of her peers. As Ann recounts the story of her life and career from this time on, it is remarkable how often she prefaces her anecdotes with "we".

During those early days the young couple lived on the \$30 a week student allowance. Sometimes they ran out of money and Hogan drove cabs. In the ultra-conservative environment of Queensland under Premier Joh Bjelke-Petersen, Sherry and Hogan also became politically engaged. Sherry became very conscious that there was no anti-discrimination legislation — and that women were still treated

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Peter Garrett AM

by
Kylie Miller

Peter Garrett is the Federal Australian Labor Party member for the seat of Kingsford Smith in NSW, and shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Reconciliation and the Arts in the Australian Parliament. He sits on the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, and the Standing Committee on Communications, I.T. and the Arts. Previously he was vocalist, co-lyricist and dynamic frontman for Midnight Oil for 26 years. Peter served two terms as President of the Australian Conservation Foundation. He received the Australian Humanitarian Foundation Award in the Environment category in 2000 and in 2003 an Order of Australia for his contribution to environment and the music industry. He is a director of the Chifley Research Centre.

“It’s better to die on your feet than live on your knees.”

Peter Garrett – rock star, lawyer, surfer, activist, politician, Christian, husband, father — conscience of a generation. For nearly 30 years, Garrett has danced on Australia’s stage, first as the lead singer of rock band Midnight Oil, then as a Senate candidate for the Nuclear Disarmament Party in the 1984 Federal election, president of the Australian Conservation Foundation (ACF), and as a tireless crusader for environmental, anti-nuclear and Aboriginal causes.

As a public figure he has been the angry voice of a generation. Voted one of the 20 most admired men in the world by the readers of an American magazine, and ninth on a list of the top-10 most influential Australian humanitarians, in 1998 the National Trust declared him one of Australia’s Living Treasures. At the height of his fame, *Time* magazine dubbed him a “walking icon of outrage”. As acknowledged

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by an interviewer during a promotional tour in 2000, Garrett “falls into the category of having done pretty amazing things for three decades, so we don’t bother with the CV”. It would be a rare Australian who hadn’t heard of Peter Garrett.

When asked to describe Garrett, one of the singer’s closest friends, former Triple J deejay, campaign manager for the Nuclear Disarmament Party (NDP) Senate bid and now Midnight Oil’s website designer, Mark Dodshon, is, not surprisingly, glowing: “He’s brave, he’s loyal, he’s strong, he’s intelligent. In a nutshell that’s it ... He’s a complex person, and yet on another level he’s a very simple and straightforward person.”

It is one of the many contradictions found in the public Garrett. He is simple, yet complex; carefree, yet cares deeply; democratic, yet mildly dictatorial; passionate, yet peaceful; quiet, yet oh-so-loud; spiritual and intellectual, yet practical and grounded; serious, yet fun-loving; organised, yet disorganised; childlike, yet deeply responsible. And perhaps most apparent, he has a huge public profile, yet a private life he treasures and carefully guards. The private Garrett is inaccessible to all but a handful of his closest friends.

In person, Garrett is an imposing figure; some two metres tall, his shaved, angular, skull-like head, loose, rubbery, pink skin and mobile features contributing to an ageless appearance. Seemingly a body composed of all limbs, he lopes in the slightly uncoordinated gait of the very tall. He is down-to-earth, patient, and generous with his limited time.

Everything he does, he does with gusto. Over lunch with friends, he apologetically admits that he doesn’t eat eggs, the result of a childhood plagued by food allergies, then promptly tucks into the proffered gourmet omelette with the relish of one who needs fuel to sustain a relentless energy. Forget the allergies — food, he agrees, is one of life’s great pleasures.

In an interview, Garrett speaks softly, leaning forward to make a point. He takes time to answer a question, thinking deeply. When the answers come, they are measured, almost poetic, every word seems to count. In conversation he’s more relaxed, gesticulating with his arms and hands to make a point, asking as many questions as he answers and listening intently to the response, nodding when he agrees with a point.

Garrett has an ability to make those around him feel special. He seems genuinely interested in what you have to say. A people person, with charisma to burn. It’s an intensity that inspires huge loyalty. A sometime Oils crew member tells of how he first worked with the band as a roadie at the tender age of 16. Now, 13 years later and well into a career as a film colourist, Justin Heitman has been known to take leave from his day job to work for the band when they visit

Peter Garrett

Melbourne. So trusting were they of Garrett's sense of responsibility that Heitman's parents signed the guardianship of their teenage son over to Midnight Oil for the duration of the 1987 "Diesel and Dust" East-Coast Australian tour, to enable him to accompany them on work experience.

"Midnight Oil saved me. They really did," Heitman says of his relationship with the band. Garrett inspired him to change direction and talked him out of quitting school. "I would have dropped out for sure if it wasn't for Peter. But he was such an inspiration to listen to, he's just so educated, and I thought, wow, that is fantastic, and here I am wanting to drop out of school! If he says it's a good thing, it's got to be right. I still look up to him as someone who I'd like to be proud of me like a father would be of a child."

Australian Democrats Senator Natasha Stott Despoja, the youngest person ever elected to the Australian Parliament, and one of the few politicians Garrett nominates among those he finds impressive, says Garrett's foray into federal politics in the mid 1980s had a big impact on her, particularly when she saw the major parties unite to block his path. "Peter Garrett is an enduring role model for many Australians — especially young Australians — and has been a constant source of inspiration for me. His creativity, his passion, and his unshakable commitment to environmental and social causes has helped encourage many of us to fight for a better, greener and fairer world," she said.

It is hard to separate Garrett, the man, from Midnight Oil, the band he has fronted since the 1970s. The band runs its business as an absolute democracy; all decisions unanimously agreed. The Oils' manager, Gary Morris, who has been with the band for 24 years and is among the handful of people who know him best, says Garrett is a thoroughbred, one in 100,000, who demands and receives from those around him the dedication, ingenuity and principle he demands of himself.

"His principle is what you have to deal with. Dealing with the man is really not a problem, but dealing with the principle, that is the criteria for his cooperation ... His principle is the firewall, and few there be that make it through," Morris says.

"Pete is on a stage in everything that he does in his public life, but he writes his own script and he directs it all, and he takes it all up with his convictions. But by the same token it is not contrived, it has to be there because he has a genuine sense of duty to make sense of his life to himself."

His convictions make Garrett a formidable foe in debate, Morris says. "He's a very deliberate and specific, extremely logical person. Every word that he speaks he makes himself accountable now and in the future."

Larissa Behrendt

by
Larissa Behrendt

Larissa Behrendt is Professor of Law and Indigenous Studies and Director of Jumbunna Indigenous House of Learning at the University of Technology, Sydney. She is a practicing lawyer and lecturer and has worked with the United Nations. She sits on various tribunals and councils, including the Administrative Decisions Tribunal and the University of Technology, Sydney Council. She is widely published. *Home* is her first novel.

My earliest memory of living in Cooma, a small town nestled in the southern highlands of New South Wales, was walking outside into the frost without shoes on and feeling my feet freeze. I have loved warm climates ever since! But I still feel a great fondness for country towns that remind me of my childhood. My other memory of my early days was arguing with my mother over what I was going to wear. She was a skilled dressmaker and would sew outfits for my brother and myself. She would sometimes change us three times a day, and was always proud that the woman who ran the preschool thought we were the best dressed children in town.

A lifetime of working in social justice has seen that little girl with the cold feet achieve some pretty interesting things. Here are some of the life lessons that matter to me.

Develop good written and oral communication skills.

My mother always read to my brother and I before we went to sleep. She would write out sentences such as "Larissa has a pretty pink dress and she will wear it tomorrow". I would have to copy it on the line underneath, tracing the curves and strokes of her hand. These activities ensured that the values of reading and writing were instilled in me as a very young child. Both my parents have always been avid readers and I grew up in a house that was filled with books. Every night my mother would read my brother and I a story,

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or we would read to her. Storytelling became a very important part of my growth to adulthood and the very special times that I spent with my mother and brother.

My father was a shift-worker so I did not see him as much as my mother. She was always with us. I thought at the time that she was a stay-at-home mom. I only found out later that she in fact had a part-time job when we started preschool, but because her care was constant and we were never left with strangers, it appeared to us that we had her all to ourselves. I visit Cooma twice a year now for work that I do at the prison, and I always drive up to my old house because my memories of it are so strong and happy.

Do not let others make you feel bad about yourself.

From Cooma we moved to Norfolk Island. My father was an air-traffic controller and he was transferred there for a two-year stint. We lived in a big house that would sigh when the weather changed. Norfolk Island had only one streetlight when I lived there and, if it were overcast at night so the moon and stars were hidden, the house would be so dark that you could put your hand in front of your face and not see it. The darkness made the creaking house seem all the more eerie and my mother was convinced that there was a ghost in it. There are, of course, many ghost stories about on Norfolk Island, most dating back to the times it was a penal colony and life in such an insular society was brutal.

It was at school on Norfolk Island that I first experienced deep racism. Certain children used to taunt me about being black and would call me names that I didn't really understand, but I knew were meant to be derogative. Some of the other children would throw things at me when I walked by. I was confused about this because I did not know that it was bad to be Aboriginal. I asked my mother why people would tease me about it and what was so shameful. She told me that they were just jealous and ignorant and that I had a cultural heritage that I could be proud of. My mother's words of wisdom did not stop me from feeling hurt and humiliated when other children picked on me, but they reassured me that there was nothing wrong with being Aboriginal.

Make sure you spend time with your loved ones.

While the racist taunts hurt, the children involved were small in number and I have many happy memories of Norfolk Island as well. My mother established the first preschool in the area and I can still picture her driving all over the island in her minivan filled with children. My father was the manager of a football team — there were only three in total — that only won one game over the two years we lived there. To celebrate the win he had a party that lasted three days!

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When we moved back to Australia it was to Sydney and the first time I had been to a big city. I still remember flying in over all the red tiled roofs, amazed at the sheer number of people.

I finished my years of primary education at a selective school that catered for high achieving and academically talented students. For the first time I experienced flexible learning and a group of peers who were bright, imaginative, and chose to play word games and cards at recess and lunch, or invent original dances to favourite songs. It was the first time I had encouragement to be confident with my abilities — both academic and creative. Leaving this environment to go into mainstream schooling took a lot of adjusting. At the time there were no selective high schools in the area where I lived and my parents thought I was too young to travel on the train to the nearest one.

Not long after I had started high school, my father had a series of heart attacks. He was one of the first people in Australia to have a bypass operation. It took him months to recover. I remember that my father was sick for a long time and he was on worker's compensation. There was a boy at school who used to always say that my father was a dole bludger and a "lazy Abo". I wasn't happy that my father was sick — he had almost died several times and we had prepared for the worst — but I was pleased that in the long months of his recovery I was able to spend more time with him than ever before. I got to know him better as he talked to me about how stars were made, how different rocks were formed, how things grow, and how the government works.

Understand what life is like for those who are less fortunate than you are.

During that time of recovering his health, my father decided that he would start looking for his family. He knew that his mother was Aboriginal, and that he had been placed in a home when he was five. Over the years, he had lost touch with some of his siblings. He searched through government archives and found a removal certificate issued by the Aborigines Protection Board that showed that my grandmother had been taken away from her family and placed in the town of Parkes. Even more importantly, the certificate showed that my grandmother had a brother, a Sonny Boney. My father then travelled out to Walgett, Brewarrina, Lightning Ridge, Coonamble, Goodooga and Collarenebri to find his uncle. Sadly, when he finally tracked him down my father found out that Sonny Boney had died only three months before my father finally knocked on his door.

My father told me about the policy of removing Aboriginal children and how it had impacted on the lives of Aboriginal people throughout New South Wales and the rest of Australia. He became involved with the establishment of a group called Link-Up, which assisted Aboriginal people find their family, and was able to help others do the same