



Style

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toowoomba girls beating the best

JODIE WILLEY AND MARYANNE OLIVER ARE MAKING THEIR MARK IN VERY DIFFERENT FIELDS. YET AS **MERRYL MILLER** DISCOVERED, THEY HAVE ONE THING IN COMMON: TOOWOOMBA PROVIDED THE GROUNDWORK FOR THEIR SUCCESS.

FORMER ST Saviour's College schoolgirl Jodie Willey never dreamed that one day she would be beating corporate giants such as McDonald's in the courtroom.

A legal partner in Shine Lawyers Queensland (a leading national plaintiff law firm with a reputation for its David and Goliath battles against large institutions), she has set a new benchmark for women in this cut-throat industry.

"I believe I am quite young - and quite "female" - to be in such a position - but Shine is not what I would call your traditional law firm," Jodie says.

"We are not afraid to be different. The firm gains great satisfaction out of spotting talent and unleashing potential in people, whatever their make-up."

Jodie landed a job with the firm as an Articled Clerk, commencing in 1995, and spent the next five years completing a law degree by correspondence and learning the ropes in the legal profession.

During this time she was exposed to a number of practice areas including family, crime, commercial and conveyancing, but found her passion in personal injuries litigation.

Since being admitted as a solicitor in 2000, Jodie has had the opportunity to be part of some memorable cases, including class actions against corporate giants such as McDonalds, and civil claims on behalf of a number of victims of child sexual abuse.

She was made partner in 2006 and more recently appointed





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the firm's Queensland Legal Partner.

"My main goal is to continue to be in a place where I am challenged, am exposed to new opportunities, and have some fun along the way - my current position gives me all of that," Jodie says.

"My favourite part of the job is listening to client stories. I draw great inspiration from hearing of people's strength in recovering from adversity.

"The worst part of the job? I'm yet to master the ability to effectively manage my time."

Time management in a career as demanding as law is certainly a big issue.

Jodie acknowledges it will become an even more significant issue when she and husband James (also from Toowoomba) eventually start a family.

"I'm yet to have children so can't fully appreciate the extra juggling and added responsibility," she says.

"But I am surrounded by some inspirational women who seem to have an ability to do it all. My mission is to somehow achieve that magic balance."

For now however, this young dynamo is focused on enjoying life...and ignoring lawyer jokes.

"James and I both enjoy travelling, so we took a year off in 2005 to explore the other side of the world. Every other year we like to dust off the passport and see what else is around," Jodie says.

"And in terms of lawyer jokes, I tend not to notice them anymore.

"Although there is that classic one - I think it's a famous line in a movie - what do you call 5000 dead lawyers at the bottom of the ocean? A good start."

Shine Lawyers has launched a landmark course to open up opportunities for those interested in pursuing a legal career. The

Shine Centre of Learning courses offer practical and innovative instruction from lawyers and educators, and will run for six days early next year. The cost is \$695 and further information is available by contacting 4699 4608.

MARYANNE OLIVER hangs on walls right across the world – or at least, her work does. An impressive achievement for a woman who presented her first art exhibition in Toowoomba at the age of just 10.

Toowoomba plays a very close place in my heart with my journey as an artist," the former St Joseph's College student says.

"Maybe it was all the fresh air but I had very big dreams as a little girl attending art classes at the Toowoomba Art Society every Saturday for all those years.

"The art scene is so vibrant and alive in Toowoomba and I am always inspired every time I come back to visit."

Yet despite wonderful community and family support, Maryanne says people have frequently told her that a career as an artist was an impossibility.

Little did they know this would only fuel her passion and determination.

"It just makes me want it more," Maryanne says.

"Like any creative venture, you have to be prepared to work damn hard and sacrifice so much to make it successful, however the flipside to such dedication is the rewards of each small step in the success.

"I have been dedicated to my art for 10 years now and it is a huge part of who I am - it is no surprise to people who know me to not hear from me for long periods of time as I can be locked away painting.

"And the even better part is I still have such a very long way to go and so much more I want to do. I have always had to work a day job full time to survive and to also fund my art."



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In 1994, aged 19, Maryanne moved to Gladstone and supported herself through art. She faced overwhelming personal struggles ending in depression, but unwilling to depend on medication, chose to heal herself through her art. She was drawn to painting mythical women, such as mermaids, as she found in them a sense of freedom, hope and strength which she lacked in herself, and was eventually able to reclaim her sense of self and move forward.

In the last few years Maryanne has been on a creative tour de force, refining her style and spending more focused time on her art. This year she was commissioned to paint a series of women on electrical boxes as part of Brisbane City Council's ARTFORCE program.

Maryanne has also branched into clothing design with enormous success with the independent label *mairzi*.

"I find inspiration every day in the people I meet, or through events in my life - sometimes the most beautiful piece can be drawn from the darkest moment, and that is truly a beautiful thing, as it represents how I look at life," Maryanne, who is represented by Tiffany Jones Fine Art gallery in Buderim, says.

"There is always a beautiful sense of hope. I love it when someone connects with a piece and they tell me how this makes them feel...what truly matters is in the eyes of the beholder and how a painting plays a part in that person's life.

"People have told me a painting brings them comfort or makes them feel good or beautiful or as though they can take on the world!

"It is such a truly rewarding feeling to have that positive affect through my work."

The work of Maryanne Oliver will feature in an exhibition opening at 6pm on December 12 at Raw Space Galleries in South Brisbane. She hopes to bring her work to Toowoomba in the New Year.