

## **Interview Transcript**

**Eddie Ngaluafe:** Hello, my name is Eddie and today we're taking five with Zoe Rathus.

This week she was the recipient of the Best Lecturer in Brisbane award from the Golden Key International Honours Society and we welcome her to the program today.

**Zoe Rathus:** Thank you very much Eddie.

**Eddie:** Can you give us a bit of a background on this particular award because it's not highly publicised, but, as I understand it the Golden Key International Honours Society is a student body.

**Zoe:** Yes, the Golden Key International Honours Society is a student body which is instigated by the best and brightest, so to speak, on various campuses around the world. We have a chapter here at Griffith University, a number of universities in Australia have become part of the idea of Golden Key and there are also universities in America, in Africa, in a range of places around the world where the idea of Golden Key has taken off.

These societies bring together the brightest students, provide a support role and seem to provide a range of scholarships and other opportunities for those students to get involved in anything that seems to range from doing social justice work or community work through to opportunities to take up scholarships for study. Its very broad ranging and I suppose touches on that idea of the 'whole person'.

**Eddie:** You've won this award known as the Best Lecturer for Brisbane award for this year. I understand that many on the executive board are students or prior students of yours?

**Zoe:** Yes, my understanding is that on the Executive of the Golden Key at Griffith at the moment, there are a number of law students who are involved and that the very generous nomination in this regard came from those students who put forward my name--nominated me for that particular award. There was then discussion about that and I have been privileged to be the recipient.

I think for me the delightful thing about this award is that it was instigated by my students, completely in my ignorance, so I had no idea that it was happening, that I had been nominated. They convinced both themselves and students from other disciplines to honour me with this.

So it's very lovely to have an award like that coming from the student body as opposed to -- I suppose some of the... awards can take a lot of work and effort from people and it's very lovely that this one has come from that direction.

**Eddie:** I thought you were going to say from the Federal government...

**Zoe:** Yes -- well...I was thinking of all the different places awards come from and thinking -- this feels like it has come very much from the right place.

**Eddie:** Yes, absolutely. They've recognised your work as the Director of the Griffith Law School's Legal Clinics.

This program -- without doubt, when I talk to a lot of Griffith Law School students they constantly come back to this point of practical learning -- the fact that they get to do these clinics within a range of law areas like commercial, public interest lawyering, Caxton Legal Centre -- community legal centres and also the Innocence project is probably the crown jewel there. It has been going for such a long, what do you think has been the secret to such a successful and sustained clinical legal program?

**Zoe:** One thing I should say is Professor Jeff Giddings who was the initiator of this program when it started and is still a key player in the program has just completed his fantastic PhD on the exact question you ask. What does it take to sustain a really good clinical program? Because you've hit on one of the most complicated issues of clinical legal education programs around the world which is sustainability.

It does take a lot of work and effort to sustain these programs and looking at the different ways in which to achieve success and then maintain it is very complicated. Certainly I think it is the dedication of the staff here at Griffith towards the program that has been so important though. The work of Leanne Weathered and Louise O'Neill at the Innocence Project and then the work that Jeff put in originally in the clinical program. The excitement that he brought to it and the determination with which he met with people around Brisbane, drawing community legal centres and legal firms and a range of legal players into that program very early on and developing a broad support base for the program outside of the law school was a really, really, important beginning.

The other work you simply have to do is work within your school amongst your staff, so your colleagues maintain the importance of the clinical program at the executive level and amongst the rest of your colleagues. In the end I think the final secret, so to speak, of the success of this particular program has been the word of mouth from the student body.

The reality is the students just love going to the clinics, they absolutely find them the most -- I guess... a process in which they gain all kinds of insights both about the law... if I'm going to say both I should have only two, I'll get my grammar right... but they gain incredible insights about the law, the legal profession, the legal system. They start to understand the strengths and weaknesses of the legal system, so often they learn as much about when the legal system can't help people, as when the legal system can help people. The other thing that we know about the clinics is that students learn a lot about themselves in doing it.

Last year, Jeff ran the 'Street Law' program for the first time, which is our newest clinical offering and we teamed with Professor Stephen Billet from [Griffith University's School of] Education [and Professional Studies] in an ALTC fellowship that he had and we used the 'Street Law' project as the contribution that the Griffith Law School made to his research, which spanned about nine universities and at each one about three different discipline areas.

He was looking at the whole question of student placement experience at undergraduate level in a really wide way and what we've learned -- so much -- from our student feedback is how much they learned about themselves doing Street Law. I think that's what -- why students carry this word of mouth information forward because each student comes out of a clinic that they do knowing more about themselves and beginning to develop a sense of identity as a professional. It's very hard for people to have that opportunity, for that kind of very specific self growth within ordinary substantive law subjects. You might be able to revel in your intellectual ability or your academic ability or even your oral mooted skills or whatever else.

But that sense of personal growth... the clinics seem to be a real clincher in terms of that area of development.

**Eddie:** You've also said this before and I think I've just picked up on what you've said -- but the concept of 'street smart'?

**Zoe:** Yes, it's a real idea about what really does happen in the law as opposed to what the textbooks tell you or what you learn. It is that real sense of -- look one of the -- there is a really famous old expression in the law which goes something along the lines of -- a good lawyer knows the law, a great lawyer knows the judge.

That doesn't mean a great lawyer knows the judge and parties with the judge and therefore gets favouritism, it's not about that. A great lawyer knows how that judges work, how that judge thinks. So you always do best with the lawyer who walks into court knowing who is on the bench and what that might mean, because that is the reality of the way that the law works.

If you know who you are dealing with, also if you know your opponent you'll do better than when you first start practicing. So one of the skills of practice is actually about getting to know the people within the system and I think that's what clinics bring to students.

All of a sudden they actually know where things are, they can walk with more confidence down George St because they actually know, which door you go through to get into the Supreme Court registry instead of having to ask to those questions that keep on revealing you as the novice that you are at first. As those questions slowly slide away, you feel a bit more--that you're the part of a lawyer.

**Eddie:** You've been in this role for a while, what you would consider to be the secret to succeeding in this particular role, because as your colleague I can see that it's quite demanding.

**Zoe:** This would be the eighty five pieces of paper on my floor for the fifty positions in clinics that I have just made into a single pile now.

Look I think that the very -- to me the important things are maintaining those very close connections with our clinic partners and I guess that I came into this role from the world of practice in Brisbane. So many of our clinic partners were personally known to me, those who weren't I've made an effort to get to know them or to strengthen relationships which may not have been particularly strong before--so that I have spent, certainly a lot of time in nurturing those relationships, finding out what we can best do to assist our clinic partners to make the clinical program happen in a way that is most beneficial for them.

That is certainly a part of, particularly the model which we use here which is the partnership model. You have to keep your partners happy, but you want those partnerships to be meaningful for your students as well. So that two way communications is an incredibly important part of it, and I think that is probably something I enjoy to do and have put a lot of time into.

Even the clinics that I don't teach I try to get around and visit most of them, except where Jeff is involved I must say. I mean Jeff and Lynne both do such excellent work where they are -- but I follow around all the clinics where we have sessional [staff] working which is an important part of our clinical program as well. We have brilliant adjunct staff working in the clinical programs, many whom have been involved in community legal centre work and all kinds of work before and again who are known to those of us on the staff. So we know the quality of the people involved in delivering these clinical programs and I think that that is really a lot of it.

I guess talking to the students a lot -- I go and talk -- even in the clinics that I may not be directly involved in teaching, I do get to most of them during the semester and am always asking the students for feedback. My colleague Christine Jones and I are trying to finalise a small grant that we had -- where we are trying to look at ways of streamlining all the resources we have available in the clinics and look at doing some more work with our supervisors in terms of training and information and resources for them.

**Eddie:** My last question was -- we had a very interesting conversation about Mary Poppins and you had quite an interesting theory about the songs of Mary Poppins.

**Zoe:** Yes, which has nothing at all to do with Clinical Legal Education, but I'm sure there is a way that I could bring it into one of the early seminars where people are getting to know each other. But yes, thank you Eddie these are the first words of my new research project, no doubt, on Mary Poppins.

I think the songs of Mary Poppins have a definite socialist feminist background. I love the way that one of the very first songs in the movie is Mr Banks coming home from his role at the Bank where he says "its grand to be an Englishman in 1910, King Edward's on the throne, it's the age of men". While he is walking down the road saying that, there in his house rushing around and grasping at the various bits and pieces of chattels as they rattle dangerously because the Captain has let off the cannon that he lets off every day at five o'clock, or maybe its six o'clock, the women are all running around in the house singing "we are clearly soldiers in petticoats, dauntless crusaders for women's votes".

Those tensions between Mr Banks's perception of himself as the master of his home and the actual things that really go on in his home from the women folk -- it really is a movie that sets a very interesting scene about 20th century gender change. But it's not something I've ever taken seriously, but I do take the words of the songs very seriously, I do know most of them. So, those who have actually managed to listen to the end of this interview can ask me next time I see them to ask me to sing one of the songs from Mary Poppins and I will do that.

**Eddie:** I'm sure a lot of people will remember that promise. Thank you so much for taking the time -- you've been very generous with your time in speaking to us today.

**Zoe:** Thanks Eddie!

### **Biographical Note**

*Ms Zoe Rathus'* research expertise encompasses;

- Family law and family law systems, particularly in relation to family violence and gender related issues
- Impact of the 2006 reforms in Australia to family law, in particular in relation to shared parenting, family violence and parental conflict
- Indigenous children and the family law and child protection systems
- Women and the criminal justice system

On Australia Day, Griffith Law School Director of Legal Clinics, *Ms Zoe Rathus*, was made a member of the Order of Australia for "service to the law, particularly through contributions to the rights of women, children and the Indigenous community, to education and to professional organisations". This is further public recognition of her legal service having been awarded the Centenary Medal in 2003 for "distinguished service to the law and women's issues in Queensland".

Ms Rathus was interviewed by Eddie Ngaluafe in July 2011