

# THE MARVELLOUS TALE OF MR AVERAGE

**PETER WARD IS ONE OF MELBOURNE'S BEST CRIMINAL LAWYERS, BUT WITHOUT AN EARLY HAND-UP HE MIGHT HAVE BEEN UNKNOWN TODAY.**



**KEEPING THE FAITH:** Criminal lawyer Peter Ward continues to work hard to repay the faith others showed in him.

If one mark of the true gentleman is humility then Peter Ward is the genuine article.

In his basement office at the William Street headquarters of Galbally & O'Bryan, "Mr Average", as he calls himself, has sat face to face with some of the country's most colourful characters.

More times than he could count he also sat face to face with Frank Galbally QC, held by many to be Victoria's greatest criminal lawyer.

Mr Ward said Frank Galbally gave him a go when no one else would – and the apprentice has risen to become one of Melbourne's top criminal lawyers.

So what sets this tale of battler's luck apart from all the others?

In a strange twist of fate, Mr Ward believes his blindness, a congenital eye defect that left him short-sighted and with less than 10 per

cent vision in each eye, may have convinced Mr Galbally to take him on.

"I don't think I would have got in the front door of a firm of this calibre without the disability as my marks only really entitled me to work in a suburban firm," he said.

"It must be said I had the ball bounce my way."

In the early summer of 1975, Mr Ward posted 40 job applications, all disclosing his vision impairment, and failed to land a single interview.

He was given his first break by Frank Galbally, who took a punt on his son David's luckless university mate.

"I didn't think [the disability] should work for me or against me. Frank was a kind, supportive and good person and he said he would give me articles, and that gave me 12 months to settle in and adjust. If they only gave me a week, I might not have survived," Mr Ward said.

"The firm was thinking: 'So what if we have a disaster? He is an articled clerk and we will not go into liquidation if it doesn't work out', and it worked for me because even if they formed a poor view of me I had a year to change that view."

Frank Galbally asked Mr Ward to stay permanently on 4 November 1975. "I remember the time and the place like it was yesterday – it was that emotional."

Nowadays, an authentic wooden door from Pentridge Prison adorns the foyer outside his office, and the Magistrates' Court is the 60-year-old's second home.

"Crime suits my personality and it has been a great thrill to represent some of the under-privileged people that I have. My role is to defend and get the best result possible and protect the interests of the client," Mr Ward said.

The applications he sent to employers all those years ago proved futile, but "some people may have been better credentialed and

why take on someone with a problem was the philosophy of the time".

"Saying that, if I took the same approach today I think I would get a few offers for interviews that may be more or less lip service because I don't know when it came to the crunch whether I would get a job," he said.

"But I might be – I hate to use the word – the token disabled lawyer they need on the books."

Mr Ward said he was actually the third blind articled clerk to work for Frank Galbally, whom he described as a "disability pioneer".

"Generally, once I get established and used to things I am fine. I have always wanted to be treated normally and was raised that way. I don't like to acknowledge that I cannot do things," he said.

"If you have a disability you tend to be very determined and that helped me because I think in the early days it was a very nervous beginning as I had a responsibility to help carry the firm's name.

"I thought I had to do really well to justify their faith in me and if I failed I did not want people to say it was because of my disability. I owe them everything really. They took an enormous punt on me."

Mr Ward was made a Galbally & O'Bryan partner in 1989.

He said he had never had to be too technology-savvy and used a device that magnified his computer screen only 2.5 times.

He also used a type of magnifying glass to read printed text and at times relied on colleagues for help.

He remembers attending the Brighton Magistrates' Court in 1974 when he heard something peculiar from the defence benches.

"It was a female lawyer and I was very surprised that a woman was appearing. Now they outnumber the men in the Magistrates' Courts. You would hope both problems are disappearing." ●

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