

Silks Day

Felicity Gerry QC on a different and special day in the life of a barrister

Being called to the Bar is a very special day after all your hard work as a student. If you are lucky, like I was, your first case in pupillage will be sitting behind Queen's Counsel in a murder. Luck, however, plays no part in whether you take silk. You have to do the hard yards over many years working on every case that is clerked to you and those you receive on your own merit and reputation. It may never happen but it is wonderful when it does. The selection is gruelling and rigorous and only the most deserving and talented can get through.

After a year of waiting, notification of appointment for me came by email and it took a while to find my glasses before I could celebrate.

Silks day involves a ceremony at Westminster before The Lord Chancellor and another at the Royal Courts of Justice before The Lord Chief Justice and all the presiders. You are asked "do you move" and you do – to the front row – and to the beginning of a new stage of your career. Well wishers appeared from all stages of my career. It was at times, almost overwhelming. I was initially sceptical about the day. It is very elitist and prohibitively expensive for legal aid barristers but in the end it was an occasion I will never forget and I am glad they let a woman, born in Dagenham, into the establishment. The day is really for your family who support your really quite bonkers and hectic career, and my family loved it.

I went to Kingston University with the fabulous Leslie Thomas and the redoubtable Charlie Hale. Ben Gumpert, now in The Hague, is a former member of my chambers as is Stuart Alford, now at the SFO. Adrienne Lucking (the good witch to my bad) and the super Will Tyler are current members of 36 Bedford Row in the criminal and family teams respectively. Mike Evans is on my Circuit and plays a mean piano. I also used to go to Birmingham and give a talk to students on a day in the life of a barrister with the lovely Liz McGrath. On Monday we all collected our letters patent as we were appointed Queen's Counsel. It was a surreal day which involved dressing up in funny outfits, bowing and scraping and herding family members. It was however, much to my surprise a magical day where all your



hard work and achievements are recognized. I loved having a discussion on jurisdiction with a commercial silk when waiting in line. We are after all members of the same Bar. I also loved the special session for Midland Circuiteers.

Of course the evening ended in jolity with friends in a bar and a selfie but the next day I donned my silk gown with pride and I hope to do it justice and fulfill the expectations of those senior to me, who have been so supportive. Most of all of course, I hope that the fact that I got there with marvellous children in tow will inspire all the legal mum's to stick to it and shine, as the sun did on our very special day. 🌸

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