

PASSION PLAYS A POWERFUL ROLE



With a colourful career background that took her to roles in Africa and with the UN, former RCSA president Beryl Rowan has seen and done a lot. But her core value regarding work remains the same.

When Beryl Rowan was first offered a job in recruitment she was pretty confident she was in the right place at the right time in her life.

"I was so thrilled," she remembers, after applying for a position through a recruitment agency that snapped her up. "I thought this will be great because I'll be able to find my ideal job

working here. But I guess recruitment was my ideal job without me knowing it initially."

For a woman whose work history until that point had been, well, let's

say colourful, Beryl never expected recruitment to be the job for her. Beryl was born in Ireland, raised in the UK and moved to Zambia in 1968 with her husband. The couple spent 10 years living in Africa before returning to the UK and then, in 1985, joined her parents who had

immigrated to Australia as GIO Poms in 1968.

Before joining the recruitment sector in her early 30s, Beryl worked in personnel with accounting firm Coopers in Zambia and spent a couple of years at the UN talking with freedom fighters when working out

of the office of Namibia's

representative before starting a child care centre in Nigeria. Once back home in England, Beryl and a friend started an early version of a party planning business selling toys, jewellery and ornaments before returning to school to complete a Higher National

Diploma in business.

Impressed by her work with the UN, Beryl soon found herself enticed to start with a small executive recruitment agency. It was not too long after this that the decision to head to Australia was reached.

"At the same time we made the decision to move I saw an ad to open

an office in Adelaide for Alfred Marks," Beryl says. "There had been no Alfred Marks presence in Australia before this [1985] so it was an exciting opportunity."

Once the Adelaide presence was established, Beryl found herself appointed to the Australian board with Slade where she started Slade Industrial and eventually started Rowan Recruitment Group.

Beryl is a Life Member of RCSA, has served as the organisation's president and was president of its predecessor in Adelaide, the NAPC (National Association of Personnel Consultants).

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Photos of Beryl during her career, which included talking with freedom fighters when working out of an office of Namibia.



Reminiscing about her early days in recruitment, Beryl remembers how she used to walk around job sites "doling out the wages for the blue-collar staff from a bag, which had thousands of dollars in it".

"I never once had trouble with that and never felt threatened or worried," she says. "It was a different time and it was quite safe to do that. But of course only the blue-collar workers were paid in cash. The white-collar staff were given cheques because that's how it was done then."

She also remembers the ways in which discrimination was insidious in some sectors; but was also able to have some fun with that.

"In the UK, I worked with an Asian woman in Birmingham," Rowan said. "The client said he didn't want

'any funny person', he wanted someone just like her. So she sent him a West Indian.

"That was one of the best comebacks I have ever heard of. He made an assumption she was white and he was wrong.

"Age discrimination was also big back in the 1980s. I had one client - a HR manager of a major company who was looking for a secretary for the marketing director - say he would only look at candidates aged between 28 and 35 and he wanted 'no whinging Poms'.

"I asked him what he thought happened to women once they turned 35. He just looked at me and then agreed to push the age out to 36! And he clearly didn't pick up on my English accent."

Beryl says the industry has come a long way since the 1980s, where long lunches that were "an excuse to party so consultants didn't bring packed lunches to work", and a complete lack of OH&S policy and very little technology were a feature.

"We didn't stress so much as people seem to today," Beryl says. "It seems more impersonal now. I was personally involved and invested in the people I worked with and that's why they were happy." Beryl, who now does career consulting and has thrown herself into volunteering with St Vincent de Paul says if she could offer one piece of advice to today's recruitment consultants it would be very simple: "If you are not passionate about what you are doing it, get out and do something you are passionate about." ■