

## Feminist fight has a long way to go

Hands up those who think the feminist movement was some quaint, short-lived social campaign that flared and then faded decades ago, job done. Ah, there you are again, Hillary, jumping up and down and wanting to shout something we men would rather not hear: sexism is alive and well, you say? Nonsense. Get home and show a grand-daughter how to cook.

It's all right, reader. I'll stop now. You haven't stumbled into the wrong column. But some blokes might want to prepare to be uncomfortable if they read on.

We'll start by speculating on what might have been going on at that Wellington law firm. There's some kind of inquiry into it, but I'm not holding my breath. They're lawyers, and while I've come across some fine legal eagles over the years (including the man who handles our meagre affairs in New Plymouth) I've also seen enough over decades of reporting court and investigating complex stories involving legal issues to know that while we'll be assured no slimy rock will go unturned in the inquiry, it's unlikely all the crawlies will be found.

I hope I'm wrong. I recall walking into an empty courtroom with the woman lawyer handling a case for which I was an expert witness, hearing her male opponent say: "Ah ... I'm so glad you're here early. I have a button that needs sewing on my jacket." Lin worked at one of the district law societies (not here) for a number of years and says nothing surprises her.

So I bring you back to Hillary Clinton. I had no interest in her book about the last US presidential election until I came across former FBI director James Comey's, in which he tries to justify the re-opening of an inquiry into her use of email just prior to polling day. That made me curious to see her take on that seminal event.

That became unimportant, though, as I became engrossed in *What Happened*, her well-written account of the campaign against Trump. Hers is hard-nosed commentary on the state of play for women in modern society. She makes a compelling case for her belief that far from being over, the fight for a rightful place has a way to go.

Her own beginnings as a lawyer mirror the incident I witnessed. She writes: "When my friend and I went to take the Harvard Law School admissions test in 1968, we were among the only women in the room. We were waiting for the test to start when a group of young men started harassing us. 'You don't need to be here.' 'Why don't you go home and get married?' One said, 'If you take my spot at law school, I'll get drafted, and I'll go to Vietnam, and I'll die.'

"There was a law professor who looked at me—a bright and eager college senior, recently offered admission—and said, 'We don't need any more women at Harvard.' That's part of why I went to Yale."

Why do comments like those resonate with me? Probably because I know what it's like to be in a "minority" – I was bullied at high school. More significantly, I worked for and with outstanding women in journalism, including the *Taranaki Herald's* legendary June Litman, renowned editor of *NZ Woman's Weekly* Jean Wishart, and editors Donna Chisholm, Jenny Wheeler and Robyn Langwell, who all faced male discrimination with courage and some cost.

Politics are even worse than law, according to Clinton: "...the balancing act women in politics have to master is challenging at every level, but it gets worse the higher you rise. If we're too tough, we're unlikable. If we're too soft, we're not cut out for the big leagues. If we work too hard, we're neglecting our families. If we put family first, we're not serious about the work. If we have a career but no children, there's something wrong with us, and vice versa. If we want to compete for a higher office, we're too ambitious."

Does that apply to New Zealand, the first country where men let women vote? We've had women prime ministers, including a current one who must be inspiring to many women. In Taranaki, we've had two relatively recent women mayors. But in 2018, only two NPDC councillors are female, and

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recent male criticism of one of them for wanting to better her knowledge makes you wonder - how much progress towards equality have we actually made?