

# Meteoric rise from Quorn to The Hague



*While growing up in Quorn, a tiny South Australian town with a population of 1400, 345 km north of Adelaide, it never occurred to Michelle Jarvis that through her chosen vocation of International Law she would move to the Netherlands to prosecute some of the worst atrocities committed in Europe since World War II.*

In fact, her career path was influenced by some of her high school teachers in Quorn and Port Augusta who encouraged her to study law. Today, these teachers are deriving great pleasure following her meteoric rise in the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) in The Hague, where she is currently based.

The ICTY was established by the United Nations Security Council in 1993 in the face of the serious violations of international humanitarian law committed in the territory of the former Yugoslavia since 1991, and as a response to the threat to international peace and security posed by the violations.

An Economics and Law graduate, Ms Jarvis was first introduced to the ICTY as an Intern in July 1997 where she served in the Office of the Prosecutor until December of that year. She returned in October 2000 and expects to remain in The Hague for the foreseeable future.

“Longevity here at the Tribunal is a lifestyle decision. Some people come and experience the work for just a year or so. Some have been here for five, while others have been here since the creation of the Tribunal in 1993,” she said.

“I find the work exciting. It is

cutting edge; we are dealing with many legal issues that have never before been thoroughly explored. Coming from an International Law background, I am finding the work extremely stimulating.”

Her rapid progression at the ICTY has added to the excitement. On her return, she was appointed an Associate Legal Officer working with the respected Judge Patricia Wald; she was then promoted to Legal Officer and is now in the Appeals Section of the Office of the Prosecutor working as an Appeals Counsel.

In her current position, she drafts appellate briefs, motions and responses; assists in the preparation of cases for hearing and the formulation of litigation strategy and presents oral arguments for the Prosecution in appeal hearings.

For most, including Ms Jarvis, the trial that has captured everyone’s attention is that of former Yugoslav leader Slobodan Milosevic.

“Milosevic has chosen to defend himself. He has refused legal representation, so this puts an interesting light on the proceedings,” she said.

“He has also made his attitude clear toward the court. He does not believe it is a fair process and he maintains that the court is biased. This has

*Above: Michelle Jarvis (centre) with fellow University of Adelaide interns Yasmine Ahmed and Hannah Tonkin*

influenced how he has handled himself in court from the outset. This has also presented challenges for the Tribunal.”

Ms Jarvis said most cases that come to the Tribunal end up on appeal and the Milosevic trial is predicted to follow the same route.

“The nature of the trial is of great interest to the world at large and I never envisioned being involved in such proceedings. I think it is fair to say that no one really thought they would be involved in this.

“For a long time there weren’t courts of this kind, although we did have the Nuremberg Trials experience and the Tokyo tribunals following World War II,” Ms Jarvis said.

Ms Jarvis said people could be traumatised by some of the evidence. “The subject matter is distressing, but in dealing with it daily, you learn how to cope. But it does come back in little ways.”

Each day begins with a 10-minute bike ride to her offices, a small amount of time for reflection, for as she puts it, “What I am doing is enormously time consuming, the cases are huge and the days extend long into the night.” ■

Story Howard Salkow