

Life Down Under

Callahan finalizes fulfilling career in Australia.

By Angela Lutz

Since **Lori Callahan, BBA '80, JD '83**, moved to Sydney, Australia, two decades ago, she jokes she became an amateur tour guide for visitors from the Midwest. Along with her husband, who is Australian born, she has shown family, friends, and even groups of alumni from Washburn University School of Law around the gorgeous coastal city she calls home. Originally from Olathe, Kansas, Callahan moved to Australia to pursue a job opportunity, and now her family spans the globe along with her career.

“We are truly an international family,” she said. “The whole time I’ve been here we’ve had the pleasure of having a steady stream of visitors – my husband jokes that we should turn our car into an unofficial tour van for visitors from Kansas. We live right at the beach. I took the ferry to work every day and I would see dolphins – the first time I saw them I thought, ‘I don’t think I’m in Kansas anymore.’ It is wonderful to share that with my fellow Kansans and Washburn grads.”

Thinking Like a Lawyer

For these reasons, Callahan has established permanent roots in the Land Down Under – and she’s excited to see where



Lori Callahan, BBA '80, JD '83, with her husband, David Taylor, in the Outback. Photo submitted

life takes her next. Early last year, she retired after a successful 17-year career with Allianz, an international financial services provider that offers insurance and asset management solutions to more than 86 million customers, making it the oldest and largest insurance company in the world. Callahan started off as their general claims manager overseeing all claims for Australia and New Zealand before eventually moving up to chief risk officer, an executive role she reshaped from the ground up.

“I got to create the position – the division, the team, the structure,” she said. “I had the board backing me. I got to deal with the top people at Allianz in Munich, and that was a pivotal point in my career. At Allianz they told me they always liked that I thought like a lawyer, and they liked my problem solving skills and strategic view of things that arose from my legal training.”

Callahan’s impressive career began with an interest in the pursuit of justice. In seventh grade, she read Dee Brown’s “Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee,” which chronicles Native American history in the late 19th century. The narratives of this marginalized group moved her. Though she didn’t have any lawyers in her family, she knew legal professionals could help people and institutions achieve equitable outcomes. She eventually discovered her true calling in argument and debate, and her mother encouraged her to follow her passion.

“I remember telling my mother in junior high that I wanted to be a lawyer and she was very encouraging,” Callahan recalled. “She definitely believed women should have real roles and be paid real money and pursue their interests. I went to Washburn on a debate scholarship. I debated all through high school. I loved trial law, so I went into insurance law because you get lots of trial work.”

Moving to Australia

A determined and dedicated student, Callahan found exactly the type of mentorship and support she needed to achieve her goals at Washburn. When she attended the law school, many of the institution’s young and energetic professors – including Nancy Maxwell, **Linda Elrod, BA '69, JD '72**, Myrl Duncan, and Jim Concannon – were not much older than the students themselves.

“They were enthusiastic and inspirational,” she said. “You wanted to go to class. You were interested in learning because they wanted you to understand. I remember the strong



From left: Lori Callahan, BBA '80, JD '83, and Linda Parks, BA '79, JD '83. Lori with Tom Schultz, BBA '87, JD '92, by the Sydney Harbour Bridge. Photos submitted

connection and the open-door policy. They guided us, mentored us, spent time with us – and we benefited from that.”

After graduation, Callahan worked as a research attorney for Kansas Supreme Court Justice **Harold Herd, BA '41, JD '42**, for two years and then as an associate and then partner at two law firms in Topeka before serving as general counsel at KAMMCO, a medical professional liability insurance company. During her time at KAMMCO, she became involved with an international association of insurance companies and got to know lawyers from all over the world. That’s when an auspicious meeting with an Australian law firm changed the trajectory of her life.

“In the very first meeting I had they offered me a job in Australia, and I hadn’t even decided if I wanted to move there yet,” she laughed. “My now Australian husband was taking me to a Fourth of July lunch at the American Club in Sydney. He was sitting in the lobby and thought I’d been kidnapped. I was supposed to be there for 30 minutes and it went on for several hours. I walked out and said, ‘I’m moving to Australia.’”

A Sense of Personal Satisfaction

A few years later, after being admitted to practice law in Australia and managing legal teams in two Australian law

firms, Callahan started working at Allianz, where her career highlights included participating in an elite international scholarship program for upcoming CEOs in Singapore, where she was among 40 participants from 25 different countries. She is also proud that, as the executive sponsor of the Allianz Pride Committee, she helped grow the company’s LGBTQIA-friendly organization from less than 2% of employees to more than 10%.

“The most rewarding part is always the people – the people you meet, and the people you’re mentoring and inspiring,” she said. “Then all of a sudden you realize they are teaching and inspiring you. The most rewarding thing in all those roles is always about the people.”

Over the years, she has found value in staying connected to Washburn and her Kansas roots as well – even as an unofficial tour guide, and even from half a world away.

“In my career I’ve had a real sense of personal satisfaction, and the education I received at Washburn prepared me well,” she said. “We were not only taught law – because the law changes – but we were taught how to think like lawyers. When I moved into roles that didn’t need me to be a lawyer, I understood how to think and how to solve problems. That’s what my Washburn education gave me.”