

All eyes on Mary Rhodes Russell

“I thought you had to be some old man to be a judge because that’s all there were all the time.”

Judge returns to campus

Alumna advises students that might follow in her footsteps

BY JESSIE GASCH
Managing Editor

When she arrived at what was then Northeast Missouri State University, Mary Rhodes Russell might have been thinking about baking Green cookies.

“I thought I wanted to be a cross between a Ralph Nader and what we now call Martha Stewart,” admitted Russell, now a judge on the Supreme Court of Missouri.

Russell visited the University March 20 to offer law school advice to aspiring attorneys — a career path that took her a while to settle on. Even after she left her family’s dairy farm in Hannibal, Mo., to come to Truman, she couldn’t have predicted that she would become the third woman appointed to the state’s highest court.

“I didn’t think I wanted to practice law,” she said. “When I was a student here, I continued to think I wanted to stick in the journalism field, write for a magazine, maybe even a consumer-type publication.”

Russell selected Truman after she spent some time on campus as a middle-school clarinetist, but she didn’t entertain hopes of making it big in the music business — she was aiming for a career as a medical dietician. She ended up with two degrees, a Bachelor of Arts and a Bachelor of Science, and is no doubt the only Truman student to have signed her own diploma.

When the University was renamed, Russell chaired the Board of Governors, so it was her duty to sign all the re-issued diplomas to alumni.

“If you see it hanging in my office, you might think it’s a joke,” Russell said.

During college, she interned

at the state capital for a summer after a features interview prompted her source, then-State Rep. Gary Sharp, to invite her to work for him.

“My first day on the job at Jefferson City, I pull up to the state capital building, and the garage door to the basement is opened by an attendant and he says, ‘What do you want?’ and I said, ‘I’m an intern for Rep. Gary Sharp. Where do I park inside this building?’” Russell recounted. “He said, ‘You intern you, you’re parking on the street!’”

These days, though, the parking attendants treat Russell a bit differently.

“Now today, I have my own parking space,” she said. “... I guess I’ve arrived in life.”

Russell said that after her experience in the capital, she considered trying her hand at studying law.

“I thought, ‘What the heck? I’ll just take that LSAT,’” she said.

For the summa-cum-laude graduate, it proved to be a deciding moment. Russell entered the University of Missouri-Columbia in the fall of 1980.

“Law school changes your outlook,” Russell said.

“It changes your vocabulary, it changes your perspectives, it changes how people look at you.”

But she wasn’t aiming for a Supreme Court slot yet: There were no female judges on the appeals courts of Missouri, and it would be nine more years before a woman was appointed to the high court.

“There was only a handful of women who were judges anywhere in the state, and they were ... at the lowest level of the judiciary,” Russell said. “There were less than five. ... It was something that wasn’t even dreamable because women didn’t hold those positions.”

But Russell did manage to capture a clerkship with the Su-

preme Court, a coveted position for recent law graduates, even though she said she wasn’t sure she had the confidence to command attention in a courtroom.

“It was unusual for women to even do that,” she said. “... But I really probably didn’t realize at the time that it was still a novelty. And I certainly didn’t think that I would ever come back to the court some 22 years later. ... I thought you had to be some old man to be a judge because that’s all there were at the time.”

But she said that despite the horror stories of some of her female colleagues, Russell never remembers experiencing discrimination based on her gender.

“Maybe that’s because nobody [was] going to beat me at politics or Cardinal baseball talk,” she said.

In 1995, after her clerkship and 12 years of private practice in Hannibal, Russell’s application to the Missouri Court of Appeals was accepted, and she saw a courtroom from the other side for the first time.

Russell said the downside to donning judge’s robes is that she might not ever find out how the parties in a case were affected by her decisions.

“On the bench, you don’t really get to see the people that you help,” she said.

For a self-described “joiner,” this is really a disadvantage. Russell has been recognized for everything from providing extraordinary free legal services to victims of the 1993 flood to becoming a three-time keynote speaker at Missouri Girls’ State. She talked at length about getting to know a female Afghan judge who fled the country after the Taliban banned women from leaving their homes unaccompanied.

Russell’s husband Jim, a former state representative and now president of MoAg Industries, didn’t hesitate when asked about his wife.

“I just feel extremely lucky,” Jim Russell said. “The only mistake I made in life is not to marry her sooner.”



Jessie Gasch/Index

Mary Rhodes Russell, Missouri Supreme Court judge, returned March 20 to her undergraduate stomping ground to encourage and offer advice to pre-law students.



Krista Goodman/Index

Farrier Neil Sanders demonstrates what to look for before giving a trim.

TRIM | Hoof care provides Merlin with healthy stride

Continued from Page 9

to trim by feeling the bottom of the hoof and observing the patterns in the heel. When a horse gets tense or nervous, a farrier only has to reassure it, Sanders said.

“I’ve been kicked, and I broke my toe when I was in school,” he said. “They get a little tense, and I let him know, ‘Hey, I got you bud,’ and he just kind of relaxes.”

Celeste Holbrook gives Merlin kisses to keep him calm. She said she owns one other horse in Texas, and in the summer, she brings him to Kirksville with Merlin to ride.

“I’d prefer to have them, if they can, go bare because I feel like it’s more natural,” she said about her horses.

Sanders nodded in agreement.

“When you put a horseshoe on a horse, you can’t change his foot,” he said. “So

he’s telling us where he wants his foot, we just got to pay attention to it.”

Applying horseshoes is an intricate process that usually takes up to an hour depending on the horse’s disposition, Sanders said. He said that when it is done the first time, the most nerve racking part is hammering the nail without causing quickening, or bleeding, of the hoof.

Finishing the final foot, Sanders stepped away and began putting his tools back into their boxes in the truck bed. Merlin let out a sigh, put his head down, licked his lip and took a few casual bites of hay.

“That is what every farrier wants to hear,” Sanders said. “He’s relaxed, he likes what he feels, his bruises don’t hurt him all of a sudden. Now he’s happy.”

For hoofcare, contact Sanders at 719-238-8473.

LIFE | Graduation leaves options open

Continued from Page 10

“How am I going to make new friends outside of work, and how will I ever meet someone new?” And he is even from St. Louis. Imagine doing it in Colorado Springs or Paris.

I really hate thinking about this.

Maybe this is why they call it the real world — because suddenly there is no structure where everyone is new and in the same situation. In the real world, not everyone is looking for friends and significant others. In an instant, everyone is on their own, struggling at different places in their life.

So at some point, meaning in about seven weeks or so, I am going to struggle on my own whether I am in my old city or an entirely new one. And in some ways, I am unlucky because no one special will be coming with me to that place to help me through this major life change. And in some other ways, I am lucky because I will not have to help anyone but myself through this struggle. There will be no temptation to stay in some nights and chill with that one person, forfeiting opportunities to make new friends. I don’t think people will pass

up being my friend because I already have someone, which I have seen happen to numerous couples in new cities. Being single will practically force me to find new friends or to reconnect with old ones.

But the truth is that I am scared to not belong to a community. Whether that community is my family, old high school friends, old college friends or even just one special person. Not belonging makes me nervous as all hell.

This is just the next step, and next steps are always scary. With someone or alone, they all pose those obnoxious questions like “Will I be happy?” and “Will this work?”

No one really knows, but my grandma always says, “It always just takes a bit of patience, but you will always fall into your proper place.”

I think that applies to finding a guy with whom to walk down the aisle, as if it is my duty in life to find this someone.

But I think, taken out of a traditional, elder context, it applies to so much more. So really, I’m just going to hope I fall into place, and I think I will. Grandma is pretty wise like that.



Mayank Dhunaga/Index

Matthew and Juli Hermanson ride their blue tandem bike to local garage sales.

RIDES | Students make mobility fun

Continued from Page 9

Moses said she has begun to paint the inside. So far, she only has song lyrics from Something Corporate, a band that both she and her mother liked.

She said she received the car from one of the teachers at her high school two weeks before her freshman year at Truman. After her mother’s death, her high school raised funds to fix up the teacher’s car to give to her.

“I figured since it was free and it wasn’t in the best shape, this would be the only chance to paint my car and do what I wanted with it,” Moses said. “So I went out and bought some car paint.”

A little paint goes a long way. She said that since she

has painted her car, she gets a lot of honks on the road and comments at gas stations. Moses said little kids in cars have the best reactions. However, not all attention is good.

“I’ve been pulled over for it too,” Moses said. “The cop tried to tell me I couldn’t have all the writing on my back window. As long as you have side mirrors you could have the back window covered up completely. It’s the law.”

During the car’s time in Missouri Hall’s parking lot, somebody scratched through some of the words on her back window.

“I’m sure some people think it’s stupid, but I don’t care because I like it, and I don’t care what other people think,” Moses said.

Get your organization involved in the

2008 Fall Activities Fair!

When: September 4, 2008

Time: 12-4 PM

Where: Quad (Rain site is Sub Georgian Rooms)

Registration: Forms are now available at the Center for Student Involvement.

Registration is on a first-come, first-serve basis.

WWW.TRUMANRENTALS.COM

Providing affordable student housing for more than 22 years.

Boardwalk • Waterworks • Park Place •

States Avenue • St. James Place • New York Avenue

**Four Horizons Realty
703 N. Marion St.
Kirksville, MO 63501**

660-665-RENT

www.4horizonsrealty.com