

# *Leading Ladies*

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By Nancy Honey

*Interviews by Hattie Garlick*

**Baroness Patricia Scotland QC: *Attorney General 2007-2010***

- 1955 Born in Dominica, the tenth of twelve siblings**
- Emigrated to East London aged three**
- 1991 Became the UK's first female black QC**
- 1997 Made a Labour peer and becomes Baroness Scotland of Asthal**
- 1999 First black woman to serve as a government minister**
- 2007 First female Attorney General**

**My father was the greatest feminist I ever knew.**

I didn't realise it until I discovered that other women thought they weren't capable of things.

**There were seven boys in my family and five girls.**

My father wanted us girls to be scientists. That wasn't an entirely usual ambition for a woman in the seventies but that kind of attitude was given no truck.

**I remember the first time I found out that our outlook was unusual.**

I was about fifteen, and talking to a friend who was brilliant and wanted to be an engineer. She said "I'm not sure I can". I asked why. "Because I'm a girl". I thought: "What?! But that's crazy!" It made no sense to me.

**When I got the bar, in 1977, only 7 per cent were women.**

There were virtually no black women. I remember people being absolutely astonished that I could even speak English. The assumption was that you couldn't be British if you were black. The whole idea of women being at the bar was still looked at askance. But I was a black, female, socialist Roman Catholic. What career was I going to take where I wasn't going to encounter problems? I had to be me, otherwise there would be no way I could get up in the morning.

**Without my faith and my family, I don't think I could have achieved much at all.**

Because there were just so many people being negative and saying "you can't do that". My family were there all the time saying, "yes you can".

**My proudest achievement is being a mother to two sons.**

I've always adored children. I'm a committed Roman Catholic and I hoped very much that I would be blessed with children but for a long time, it looked like it wasn't going to happen.

**For any parent, having an active career is a very big challenge.**

Increasingly, fathers too are torn because they want to have a very active role in their children's lives – be there physically as well as emotionally. My advice is to concentrate on being there to do the joyful and essential things with your children – the things that are essential to them and joyful for both you and them.

**My children and I enjoy each others company – I'm so grateful for that. I always try to make time for them.**

That means that when they call at 3am, I say "What's up?" and not, "Do you know what time it is?"

**It's important to involve them in what you do, too.**

Make it something they can respect. My parents gave me a very strong sense of public duty. Allowing your children to see you doing your public duty and to see why it is important helps. Talk to your children, that's my tip.

**Many women look at what public life involves and they just don't want it.**

It isn't that they don't want to work hard, or work for change. They just don't want that level of public scrutiny. They'd often rather be in the background, working collaboratively - more ready to talk about 'we' than 'I' and so they don't like the nature of 'I' politics.

**But if you don't get involved then nothing changes.**

Having more women involved in policymaking will, and already has, helped to change the culture.

**This isn't about political correctness.**

It's about what works, what's economically smart. It's not soft and fluffy, it's where we need to be in order to be competitive and keep our place in the world.

**In the financial crisis, those companies who had a good gender balance on the board did best.**

It's the dynamic between the genders that engenders success. A balanced leadership team provides better outcomes.

**In the future, the real economic driver will be talent and talent comes in a multiplicity of forms.**

So it's incredibly important that we don't exclude fifty per cent of that talent or intellectual capital. If you want to build a company that will succeed or a stable future for this country, you have to create a balance that is fair to everybody and an environment which is attractive to women.

The UK has always punched about its weight and we can't now afford to be retrogressive and Neanderthal.

**I was brought up to believe that all of us have to strive to make a contribution, try and make the world better for someone else.**

If I'd have been a toilet attendant, I would have tried to be the best one in the world. We were also told never to be afraid to fail. The only disgrace is in never having tried.

**Believe in yourself and your talents.**

That's what my father taught me and that's what I would like to say to young people today. If I had the power, I would like everybody to have the equivalent of Arthur M Scotland in their lives.