



The Black page

BY JOANNE BLACK

Getting rankled

Christine Rankin and broken ankles – they are both somewhat annoying.

The four weddings and a funeral for which Christine Rankin will be forever known have absolutely nothing to do with her suitability for a role on the Families Commission. I realise I am somewhat out on a limb in saying this. A straw poll of almost everyone I know, and a perusal of the main newspapers' editorials, makes this plain. And I should say at the outset that I am not a great fan of Rankin. To me, she lacks good judgment – in politics, in media management and especially in earrings.

I do, however, admit to having a soft spot for her because her Employment Court case against the Government, which I covered as a reporter for the *Evening Post*, was among the best live theatre I have ever witnessed. The only production that beat it, in my experience, was a Royal Shakespeare Company production of *Othello* at the Wellington International Festival of the Arts some years ago. In fact, if Rankin, former State Services Commissioner Michael Wintringham and former head of the PM's Department Mark Prebble had turned the case into a stage show, they could have toured the country with it.

However, I do not see that Rankin's proclivity for marrying, whatever the haste or circumstances, has anything to do with her fitness or otherwise to be on the Families Commission.

In fact, if a marriage is the foundation of family life, as some people argue, then



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Rankin's determination to be in one seems to make her a champion. She shows much more commitment to being married than all those people who give up after just one or two attempts. And it is not a crime to be married four times – as long as the marriages are consecutive, rather than concurrent, of course.

The real scandal here is why the Families Commission even exists, why it needs seven commissioners and why it only amounts to a bunch of talking heads commissioning research on the bleeding obvious. The Families Commission costs the taxpayer \$8 million each year. If you took that money and divvied it up as subsidies for children's braces, glasses and school shoes, it

would almost certainly have greater practical benefit for real families.

■ "Have you seen one of these before?" asked the nurse in Wellington Hospital's orthopaedic clinic, where I had gone to have the cast on my leg removed. I almost said "of course, it's a vacuum cleaner", but then I noticed the circular saw attached to one end of the hose pipe. Nurses can at times be like airport security officers. They have a lot of power over you, and the ability to cause you plenty of discomfort. Benign compliance is usually the best policy to follow. At any rate, the contraption, whatever it was, cuts through plaster but does not keep on cutting

through the skin, flesh and bone underneath. And so away she went and soon my cast was off, revealing, for the first time in more than six weeks, my lower right leg. My foot is swollen and looks like a sausage in a pan moments before someone pricks it. My ankle has a distinct similarity to a lamp post, but nevertheless still looks more like an ankle than when I last saw it, smashed and broken as I lay in a children's park after slipping on wet grass. Right now, I can't imagine how I will ever be able to wear a pair of shoes again – not unless one of them is at least two sizes larger than the other.

For six weeks having wished for nothing more than the removal of the cast, I was relieved when a nurse strapped a big moon boot around my foot before sending me on my way. It is surprising how quickly confinement represents security. If I was a sow released by animal rights activists, I would probably turn tail and head back into the crate.

■ Being a Luddite, I do not normally read technology news but my attention was caught by the prediction of Google boss Eric Schmidt, that within the next 10 years technological advances will make it possible to have 85 years' worth of video stored on the equivalent of an iPod. It sounds rather like the invention of Silly Putty – a remarkable achievement, but it's a shame no one ever wanted it nor, once they had it, could think of a single useful thing to do with it. ■