

Stephanie Scharf's Remark's Upon Receiving the Founder's Award from the  
Chicago Alliance for Women, Chicago Bar Association, May 22, 2015

Thank you Samantha and Sarah and Ted for your very kind introduction – and thank you Ted for not telling the hamster story. As you can see, I have wonderful partners and I am so very glad to have them here with me today along with everyone else from my firm who is sharing today with me.

Let me also thank Ana Duta for presenting a fabulous keynote and congratulate Megan Mathias upon receiving the Ada May Hulett award.

And of course, I am profoundly grateful to the Alliance for Women, its board and its members, and the Chicago Bar Association for honoring me today. I remember when the Alliance was formed over 20 years ago – it was a very early role model for how women's affinity groups in bar associations can and should give women lawyers the networks and learning and soft skills that we all need to succeed. And the Alliance morphed into women's initiatives and affinity groups in all sorts of settings today, including private firms and corporation.

Not surprisingly, the Alliance was founded by my friend and mentor Laurel Bellows who has created so many wonderful initiatives for women lawyers. Laurel is out of the country and could not be here today but as always she is with me in spirit. And I also want to express my appreciation to Andi Kramer, who is here today and who has guided women in their careers with very practical advice and is another terrific role model. And a special callout to Sophia Hall who is a former President of the NAWJ and has long been a leader for advancing women in the law.

There are so very many people who have helped me move forward practicing law and being engaged in issues affecting women lawyers – far too many to name. Certainly and without question the most important person in my life for over three decades has been my husband Jeffry Mandell, who is also a lawyer, and occasional trial partner -- but more importantly has been the most wonderful husband and with him we raised two delightful children. One of them, Meredith, is overseas right now although I know she wishes she could be here. The other, my son Jonathan, is here today and he has been a joy since the day he was born – he’s the guy over there doing the videotaping.

Megan’s thanks to her mother struck a note with me. I can’t tell you exactly why I’ve always had an interest in women moving forward --- I know that I was profoundly influenced by my mother, Elizabeth – who by the age of 8 was an orphan. Both her parents had died – and yet, through the rest of her life, she had the “grit” as we might say today, to push herself forward, finish high school, attend a tuition free city college at night working days at a department store selling perfume during the day, graduating and working at the time in a job that was considered the crème de la crème – Executive Secretary. She worked in an advertising agency, a la Mad Men -- backing up the men but never able to be an executive herself. Her sister my aunt Tillie was a legal secretary – LOVED the law and always wanted to be a lawyer and just did not know how it could be done.

These were women who were smart, and worked hard, and raised families and kept working and were stopped – not with a glass ceiling but at a time when the ceiling was made of concrete.

That stuck in my craw – it so hurt these women who had no way to go where they wanted to be.

My father, Meyer, also very hardworking, had lots of ups and downs in his life but no matter what he picked himself up, and just kept going to the next dream and he often got there. He was the father of two daughters, no sons – and fortunately he forgot to tell his daughters that there were things in life they could not do.

Fast forward, I have been practicing law for 30 years almost to the day. I've been very lucky in my career. I learned to practice law as an associate and partner at Kirkland & Ellis with fabulous lawyers --- all men who took the time and interest in helping me along – men like Fred Bartlit who gave me a chance and backed me in so many different ways and taught me so much. I later became a partner at Jenner & Block – two different firms with very different litigation styles, and I had the privilege of working with other men who were fantastic lawyers, and I was especially privileged to work closely with Tony Valukas, another wonderful role model.

But at the same time that I was moving along, year after year, not just in my firms but everywhere, I saw many, many women --- the large majority of women -- leaving private practice all over the City. And that seemed wrong to me. These were smart, hard-working, confident women when they started practicing law and the system beat them down. Death by a thousand cuts on account of gender – sometimes statements were made out loud and sometime it just happened and the women had no idea why.

Well, now that you have children, you really should not travel.

Well, you're not married and my wife will not want me to work with you.

Well, what would the GC say if we put a women on the deal – I can't take you out to dinner with him?

Well Jim has a family to raise, and he needs to earn more than you.

And sometime it was worse – the partner who showed up at midnight knocking on an associate hotel room door, in his pajamas, could he come in to talk about discovery! The young woman lawyer whose discussion of her brief took place at 6 pm at night in a male partner’s office lit only by perfumed candles. And I could recite far more.

So when you asked firms, why are your women lawyers leaving, it was typically the same answer – they want to spend more time with their children; they don’t want to work so hard, they are thinking about not working at all, and so on. Any firm was filled with hallway anecdotes about all of the idiosyncratic reasons why women were leaving.

But when you spoke to these smart, talented, ambitious women, they weren’t leaving to stay at home with their kids – they took another job – maybe at a corporation, maybe in public service or government, or very small businesses or very small firms. They did not want to deal with the gender gap that was glaringly obvious in most every firm 15 and 20 and 30 years ago.

That bothered me. What an enormous waste of talent for the firms and what a demoralizing career path for women lawyers. And there came a time when I could do something about it. I was President of the National Association of Women Lawyers in 2004 and 2005 – and it gave me the chance to start many programs that had been sticking in the back of my social psychologist’s mind for quite a while.

And so, I started the NAWL Annual Survey of Retention and Promotion of Women in the Law. The first step, as I saw it, was to get hard data – to get objective data about what was happening in firms to women who started out there. I ran that survey for 8 years, from 2006 through 2013 – and each year, we obtained objective statistics on a national sample of law firms showing that there was a

systematic gender gap – hiring at close to 50% but equity partnerships at only 16%; less compensation for women at every level except entry positions; rainmaking credit going overwhelmingly to men with 90% of the highest paid people in the firm being men.

That research inspired the first national survey of women’s initiatives, where we focused on the factors that can lead to effective change in firms – the importance of a strategy, of leadership from the top, of setting concrete goals that fit the strategy, and then measuring whether those goals are being achieved.

And next month, the ABA is about to publish another first-ever study, showing the role that women play at trial and the extent to which they have the opportunity, or not, to be lead trial counsel in federal court.

Now, for a number of years you won’t be surprised to learn that very often I was the voice in the room that gave the bad news – about what was not working. But more lately, I have a great deal of confidence that we are in the midst of a sea change in the legal profession both for women and for minority lawyers. And I believe that the research that has been done, not just by me or NAWL but by individuals and organizations all over the country – that research has led to an intense dialogue about what can we do? And that dialogue, which has been going on for a number of years, had an impact that is now beginning to be felt.

Take a look at the judiciary, for example, where roughly 30% of judges are women – and here in Chicago we have a remarkable set of statistics:

Supreme Court CHIEF Justice Rita Garman – with three women out of seven members on the Illinois Supreme Court

First District Appellate Court Justice Shelvin Hall in the lead there

And Seventh Circuit Court of Appeal Chief Judge Diane Wood

And corporations are finally weighing in and pushing their outside counsel to get with their diversity programs – putting increasing pressure on firms to make sure that women lawyers of color are in the highest levels of client matters and are compensated and rewarded for the quality of their contributions to client work.

Every one of us can find something that's fun for us == that we can bring into the practice of law. I have a friend who worked in a large firm and as a hobby liked movies – and she started to write the monthly movie reviews in her city's daily law journal – so when one of the senior partner brought in work from a movie studio and asked, who knows about the movie business? Everyone pointed to her because she wrote a movie column -- and she started working on little bit of business for a major movie studio and ended up a number of years later being the company's General Counsel.

I always like building things. When I was in high school I was the only girl in the school who took what we called in the pre-computer age “mechanical drawings” which was in essence learning to draw blueprints. Years later, I took up the hobby of building miniature houses.

And now I am building a law firm along with my law partners Ted and Sarah, and we have built what is now the largest majority women owned law firm in Chicago and I believe in the state of Illinois and Wisconsin and Indiana as well. That has been a thrill -- to put into practice all the good ways to practice law and eliminate the things that we think get in the way of practicing law.

So in closing, I would say on this day of the Founder's Award – that I “found” myself in the practice of law – I love to practice law. And I also found myself in the research and writing I've done for advancing women in the law – opened up

wonderful partnership and friendships and a feeling of satisfaction we move forward. I found myself in the excitement of building a law firm.

And to be honored here today is very moving for me. I thank the Alliance for Women for the honor of receiving this award and thank all of you for being here today.

Thank you.