



From the President
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 AARONS WARD

Grandma Florence was a lawyer

WHAT KIND OF TRIAL LAWYER WOULD SHE BE TODAY, WHEN WOMEN MAKE UP 44% OF CALIFORNIA ATTORNEYS?

Florence Josephson stayed up all night with a few friends waiting for the next day's New York Times. Just before sunrise, they went to the newspaper box at the corner of the street near her apartment building to buy the paper. She put her three cents into the box and pulled out a copy. Because, in New York in 1946, that was how bar results were released. A month of waiting and then stay up all night to buy a copy of the paper to see if you passed – if your name was in the paper. So, in the early morning hours on August 22, 1946, my grandmother, Florence, opened the New York Times to page 33 to see that she had passed the bar on her first try.

Grandma Florence started law school in the early '40s. She took a year off between her first and second years to work for the Army on a military base where she worked with chemicals; she had majored in chemistry in college. Then, after passing the bar, she worked as a general practitioner attorney for about three and a half years. My Grandma Florence was extremely organized, a master crossword player, and a voracious reader. She was a female lawyer when only about three percent of all lawyers were women.

When I learned my grandmother was a lawyer I welled up with pride and curiosity. Proud to learn she was a trailblazer, a lawyer when there were hardly any women in the profession. I was also curious – how was she treated? What was her experience like? The only story shared with me about her legal work was how she had worked up a murder case – did all the preparation work, all the interviews, motions, and trial preparation – only to have her male boss take it away from her the day before trial saying something to the effect of, "I can't have a woman trying a murder case." I never heard what happened at that trial and I often wonder what kind of trial lawyer

could she have been? What kind of trial lawyer would she be today? Would she have been trial counsel on that murder case today?

We've come a long way in the 79 years since my grandmother became a lawyer. According to the ABA, women currently make up 56% of ABA-accredited law school students and, since 2019, the number of women earning JDs exceeds their male colleagues. (<https://www.americanbar.org/news/profile-legal-profession/women/>) When there are numbers at the grass roots, it percolates up – law schools feed government jobs, law firms, as well as solo and small practitioners. With more female lawyers there is a deeper pool to fill the judiciary and mediator ranks. According to the State Bar of California, today women account for 44% of California attorneys, compared to 26% in 1991, 32% in 2001, and 40% as of 2017. (CalBar Historic Demographics <https://www.calbar.ca.gov/About-Us/Who-We-Are/Historic-Demographics>)

CAALA's active 45-member board of governors includes 25 amazing female attorneys. Our executive committee currently is one-third female and there are strong female board members who will undoubtedly be part of our executive committee in the years to come. The broader scale numbers are there and improving. While there is room for improvement in many areas, one spot seems glaring. It is time to flood the ranks with female trial lawyers.

Last year, I was chair of the CAALA Trial Lawyer of the Year (TLOY) committee. Unfortunately, of all the nominees, only about 10% were female. This is not enough.

Women Trial Lawyers of the Year

CAALA began giving the Trial Lawyer of the Year Award in 1972. In 2012, Christine Spagnoli became the first

woman to win the award. The second, Maryann Gallagher, was in 2016. The third, Natalie Weatherford for 2024, was honored at the CAALA Gala on March 8. These women are truly amazing trial lawyers, but these numbers are not enough – they don't reflect the talent that exists among female lawyers in the plaintiff's bar.

There are signs this may change. In 2012, CAALA gave out its first Rising Star Award and, since then, seven of its winners have been female (I had to go back and count). In 2017, CAALA held the first annual Women's Trial Skills Conference. Last year, at CAALA's first Advanced Plaintiff's Trial Academy, one-third of the students were female.

To keep improving, we need to keep asking the tough questions, like, are trial opportunities being taken from talented female lawyers by male supervisors, like it was Florence? Do structural issues exist that make it more difficult for women lawyers to take their cases to trial? Whether judges make it more difficult for female trial lawyers (e.g., not giving trial continuances so female trial counsel can take maternity leave)?

So long as CAALA and its members continue to be deliberate in the opportunities, training, and development of the female trial lawyers in our ranks, we will be able to look back on 2025 as the beginning, or continuation, of a pattern of female trial lawyers being honored with our Trial Lawyer of the Year award.

I look forward to the day when we do not know the number of female CAALA Trial Lawyer of the Year winners. When, to find that number, we need to go back and count. So no female trial lawyer will look back at her career, the way my grandmother looked back at hers, and wonder what would have happened if she had just gotten to try that case. ☐