When I entered law school in 1971, women made up only about 12 percent of first-year classes in law schools across the country. Today, women represent over 50 percent of the student body at the Brandeis School of Law and many other law schools across the nation. The advances that women have made in the profession and as faculty members and top administrators have been slower, but significant progress has been made.

Within the practice, women continue to encounter glass-ceiling issues, but in Louisville progress continues. Many of our female alums hold key positions within the bar and are represented in the judiciary and in leadership within private practice. They also are making their mark in a number of other ways within their various communities.

At the Brandeis School of Law, 12 of our 30 faculty members are women—clearly higher than the national average. Four of our seven top administrative staff are women. I am the second woman dean at this law school, Barbara Lewis having served from 1982 to 1990. Women are highly visible in all aspects of the law school's programming—the most recent Harlan and Brandeis lectures have been delivered by nationally and internationally recognized women lawyers and jurists.

As we reflect on the traditions of inclusion at both the Jefferson School of Law and the Brandeis School of Law, it is an opportunity to celebrate our history. This opportunity allows those who were the early pioneers to share their stories and to see, through the stories of more recent graduates, the progress and changes that have been made.

Each of us stands on the shoulders of those who came before us. As we review our history and learn each other's stories, we can acknowledge and appreciate the presence of women at the Brandeis School of Law.

Justice Brandeis' views about the role of women in society are interesting and evolved over time. Initially he opposed women's suffrage. Later, impressed by the work and intelligence of the strong and reform-minded women he knew, he became a strong supporter of this cause. He believed that women, would bring perspectives that "would improve social and industrial conditions."

I believe that he would be very pleased today to see that the law school named for him is represented by so many extraordinary women students, alums, staff members and faculty.
REMEMBERING ...  
THE EARLY YEARS

The law department at the University of Louisville was established in 1846, but for more than 60 years it was an exclusively men's club. According to the department's 1881 bulletin, "Any student may enter ... who gives evidence of sufficient mental development to begin the study of law."

Despite its invitation to all, women found the doors closed to them. A Centennial History of the University of Louisville described the climate at the law school at the end of the 1800s:

"The class of 1892 objected to women students. The attitude of men toward women in the 'gay '90s' was quite different from that of today. Girls who were ambitious to study law just could not be 'nice girls,' and if they were 'nice girls,' the boys felt that they could not be natural with them around, because in the classroom it was not uncommon to utter something risqué."

"One year, at the beginning of the session, several girls from Anchorage, Kentucky, applied for admission to the Law Department. When it was discovered that the Junior class would have to convene first in the afternoon for them to make the trip back each day, the men voted to have the Senior class meet first. In this way they made it impossible for the girls to attend the law school."

In the years that followed women encountered various obstacles, but the admissions barrier was broken in the early 1900s. In 1911, U of L awarded its first law degree to a woman—N. Almee Courtright.

Courtright (known as "Mother" to her classmates) was a remarkable woman. According to the yearbook, she had an extraordinary career working in the slums of Chicago, organizing athletic events for youths and building an open-air gymnasium. She also was credited with being the "originator of the idea of taking children from the germ-laden city to breathe the fresh country air." She studied and lectured throughout Europe and India and was a school administrator in Madras.

In 1912, Elizabeth Marshall Johnson, Marguerite W. Dravo and Laura Wehner began their law studies at U of L. According to an article in Brandeis Brief, the dean at the time expressed reservations about the commitment of these women, but two years later all three graduated.

At about the same time, the Jefferson School of Law—a proprietary night school that was established in 1905 and later merged with U of L—was grappling with the question of whether to admit women. That struggle was reflected in the school's 1914 catalog:

"For years it has been a debated question in the Jefferson School of Law whether or not to admit women. But finally the Board of Trustees acceded to their demands. Any girl in the position of stenographer can qualify herself for greater earnings by a knowledge of law and legal terms. This affords a splendid opportunity for the acquisition of these features. A knowledge of law opens many new fields to men and women."

The statement reflects the view of the day—by studying law, a woman might improve her skills as a legal secretary. According to women graduates of the 1930s and 1940s, this attitude prevailed well into the 1950s.

The Jefferson School of Law graduated its first female in 1915. For the next 35 years, women enrolled at both the
Jefferson School of Law and at U of L, but the numbers were small—some years two or three, other years none—and many did not graduate.

Maria "Kitty" Coolman Meuter, a 1939 Jefferson graduate, reported that there were nine women in her first-year class but by Christmas she was the only one left. Class lists during that era would suggest that her experience was not unusual. Nevertheless, those who did prevail were assimilated into the student body. They participated in moot court and debate, the yearbook staff and, more often than not, were elected secretary-treasurer of their class. Some excelled academically.

Lucretta Irwin, '31 Jefferson, was described favorably in the school yearbook. "'Luke' is the real sweetheart of our class. Always at the very top in her studies, she has come through the course like a 'real man' and has given the class a new respect for the ability of women in the legal profession."

Women actually were welcomed to U of L during World War II when enrollment of men reached an all-time low. An article appearing in The Courier-Journal in 1943 noted that four times as many female students were enrolled as usual (for a total of four).

"Far from resenting the intrusion in a predominately masculine domain, the 10 men registered are glad about the whole thing," the article read. "The faculty doesn't feel bad either; enrollment

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**Timeline**

1911

N. Almee Courtright, the first woman to receive a law degree from the University of Louisville.

1915

The Jefferson School of Law awards its first law degree to a woman.

1928

Helen Daniel is one of only a handful of women to graduate from the University of Louisville in the 1920s.
of the girls means the school is high in enrollment for schools its size."

Although the barriers to law school admission had been lifted, women who completed law school in the '20s, '30s and '40s found entrance into the profession challenging. In 1993, Brandeis Professor Kathleen Bean interviewed 20 women law graduates from this period. Most reported that they had, for at least a time, been employed as secretaries following law school.

The story of Georgia Mae Nelson Dunn, '31 Jefferson, is typical. Following admission to the bar she worked for a law firm, but her primary responsibilities were secretarial. When she finally opened her own law office, she said she did "court reporting, depositions and that sort of thing." She was a federal court clerk for a time and then left the workforce when she married.

In 1959, following the death of her husband, Dunn again took a job as a secretary with a law firm and eventually did some legal work. She ultimately became an associate in the firm—but not until more than 30 years after graduation from law school.

Alma Alcoren Limoges Baldauf, another 1931 Jefferson graduate, had a similar career path. She held several secretarial positions with lawyers. Around 1957 she became chief deputy clerk of the Fifth District Federal Court in Louisville.

Lois Thompson Troyer McGrath, '47 Jefferson, also worked for the federal court as a secretary-clerk.

### THE '50s

The 1950s brought about a number of changes in legal education. At the beginning of the decade, the Jefferson School of Law merged with the U of L School of Law and day and evening programs were now under one roof.

In part because of the merger, the law school graduated record numbers of women in the early years of the decade. The classes of '50 and '51 included a number of women who later would become prominent members of the legal profession. Estelle Gordon Cohen, Edith Fitzwater Stanley, Gemma Elliott Harding, Olga Sapp Peers and Irene Long Pigman were among the 10 female graduates who would lead the new decade.

Despite the strong start, enrollment during the balance of the 1950s was not much different than the years before. Some years there were two or three women graduates, in many other years, none.

When asked whether there were barriers to achieving a legal education, women of this era often responded "no," but at the same time they told stories that would suggest they were treated differently than their male colleagues.

One female graduate reported that the criminal law professor would always call on her whenever a case involved sex. Another professor would address the class as "gentlemen" and, after an extensive pause, add "and lady."

Sadly, these same stories would be told for the next 30 years.

In the '50s the professional opportunities for women graduates improved slightly. Like those before them, they often began working as secretaries in law offices.

In an interview with Professor Bean, Edith Fitzwater Stanley reported that after law school she had job offers but they were all for secretarial work. "I was already doing that," she notes.

However, over time many, including Stanley, established themselves in the legal profession. Others held prominent positions in government, public service and business.

### THE '60s

In some ways, law school in the '60s was not much different for women than it had been in the '50s. The number of women remained small, and in some years there still were no female graduates. Male faculty persisted in calling on the women for the details of rape cases and addressing the class as "gentlemen" or "boys."

For most of the decade, librarian Pearl Von Allmen was the only professional woman in the law school. In a small way she tried to provide support by hosting an annual tea for women students, all of whom could fit in her little living room.

One change that ultimately had a very positive effect on women was the establishment of the Journal of Family

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**1930**

Beulah Hamilton, '30, is a member of the first law sorority, Phi Delta Delta.

**1932**

Early women students at the Jefferson School of Law actively participate in moot court.

**1940**

Marie Coolman Meuter, a 1939 graduate of the Jefferson School of Law, is believed to be the first woman to attend a Kentucky Bar Association's annual meeting.
Law in 1961. Journal membership is a prized academic honor and, as the sidebar below demonstrates, women have played a significant role in the publication. In many ways, the Journal provided an avenue for women to excel academically that had not existed before—and it gave them greater visibility within the law school community.

Perhaps the most important change occurred toward the end of the decade when the law school hired its first women faculty members including Jacqueline Rothschild Kanovitz, '67, who remained on the faculty until her retirement in 1998. Though their numbers had not increased significantly, women had become more visible. And when they sought employment following law school, most did not begin as legal secretaries. Although the doors to the larger Louisville firms were still closed to women, the graduates of the '60s practiced on their own, assumed academic positions and engaged in government service.

The '70s

In the late '60s and early '70s, female enrollment hovered at around 5 percent, but in 1973 enrollment jumped to 11 percent and rose steadily thereafter.

But the law school still had not "adjusted" to a new kind of law student. Pregnant students found that there were no policies to deal with their absences. Women still reported that faculty members would try to embarrass them in class. In some classes, women got off easy and were not called upon unless they volunteered. At the time it seemed like a pretty good deal, though years later they came to realize that class recitation was an important part of a legal education.

Also, in some circles there was a concern that women might be taking the place of men in law school classes. One female student of this era tells the story of a law school administrator who expressed this concern in an effort to determine whether she was earnest in...
her desire to attend law school. Writing about the experience 30 years later, she says, "The most amazing thing about this story is that neither I nor the law school official thought there was anything unusual about the conversation."

By the end of the '70s things really had changed. Women comprised 25 percent of the student body and there were three female faculty members.

Those who graduated in the early part of the '70s still had difficulty getting in the door of large firms. (One graduate reported that a law firm interviewer told her that he expected his firm would have a woman attorney by the end of the century—but not before.)

Despite the barriers, women of the '70s navigated the rough waters. Some practiced with small- to medium-sized firms. Others found the governmental and business communities more welcoming. They went to work for state and federal agencies, banks and corporations. Some, such as Lois Gruhin, '71, were hired by major firms—but not in Louisville.

Eventually the doors of large firms did begin to open and by the mid '70s some firms actually were looking to hire a woman. What is most interesting about this generation is that despite the fact that they faced very difficult challenges gaining entry into the mainstream of the profession, most expressed gratitude for the support they received from those around them. For some, their mentors and role models were classmates, many of whom

**WOMAN**

**FACULTY**

Although women began enrolling in both the University of Louisville and the Jefferson schools of law in the early part of the century, it was a long time before they took their place on the faculty and administration.

*Pearl Von Allmen began her career as a law school secretary, but in 1940 when the librarian position became vacant she was appointed to fill it. As was the tradition, the librarian taught legal research, and in 1965 she was given the rank of instructor. In 1973 Von Allmen was promoted to full professor, but her title never changed—she was always referred to as "Miss Pearl."

In the late 1960s the law school appointed several women to regular, full-time teaching positions. Among them was Jacqueline Rothschild Kanovitz, a 1967 graduate, who was the first woman to be granted tenure. When she became pregnant some worried that she might leave, but in true Jackie-style she had her baby during winter break and never missed a class. The '70s brought additional women to the faculty. In 1972 Kathleen Brickey joined the faculty, but later went to St. Louis. Linda Sorenson Ewald and Judith Grgich-Richardson (both Louisville graduates) filled temporary positions in 1976. They later became permanent faculty.

Throughout the late '60s and '70s two or three women were always on the faculty, but never more. All of that changed in the 1980s. Barbara Buchanan Lewis '62 was named dean, the school hired its first woman faculty of color and a number of additional women, including professors Kathleen Bean and Grace Giesel. The '90s brought even greater change with the addition of professors Serena Williams, Enid Trucios-Haynes, Karen Jordan, LaVonda Reed-Huff, Lisa Nicholson, Judith Fischer and Susan Kosse, also a Louisville graduate, and Dean Laura Rothstein.

Today, unlike the past, Brandeis boasts one of the highest ratios of women faculty in the country—12 out of 30.
were older women with established careers in other fields. And there were professors—some women but mostly men—who guided and encouraged female students. And when women went out into the real world, there were other attorneys ready to help them succeed in a very competitive profession.

The ’80s

The ’80s brought dramatic changes to the law school. At the beginning of the decade, approximately 25 percent of the student body was female. By 1989, that amount had increased to more than 45 percent. During the ’80s, Barbara Buchanan Lewis, ’62, was named the school’s first woman dean, professors Kathleen Bean and Grace Giesel joined the faculty and Linda Ewald became associate dean.

One 1984 graduate, who had first entered law school in 1971 but withdrew for family reasons, noted, “There was a remarkable change in attitude and acceptance of women in that 10-year period.”

The once-rare sight of a pregnant student was no longer unusual. A 1983 graduate describes one of her favorite memories—a baby shower that other law school students hosted in the law school building. “At the time,” she recalled, “it seemed surreal to be opening baby gifts in the midst of academia steeped in male tradition. I will never forget the thoughtfulness and caring of those women friends.”

As with each decade before, entry into the profession became just a little easier. Women were hired by law firms of all sizes, and opportunities in government and industry increased.

By the end of the decade, female graduates of the late ’70s and early ’80s were becoming partners and leaders in the community. They also began assuming leadership roles in the organized bar. In 1989, Peggy Lyndrup, ’79, was named president of the Louisville Bar Association and Lucille Fannin, ’80, was named to the Louisville Bar Foundation Board.

The ’90s

Women law graduates of the ’90s closed out the century in high style. The decade brought even more females into the classroom as both students and professors. Consistently the number of entering women students in the 1990s totaled 40 percent or more, a significant increase from the early 1980s. In addition, more women faculty joined the law school, which positively impacted its culture and environment.

Maybe for the first time women began to feel accepted in the classroom and the legal community. If nothing else, the ’90s ushered in a new era in which women were commonplace in legal circles—not the exception. Like those before them, the ’90s women were leaders in and out of the classroom. Eight of the 10 valedictorians during the decade were women. At least nine were editors-in-chief for the Journal of Family Law and two were managing editors for the Journal of Law and Education. Three—Andrea Wilson, ’99, Regan Radland, ’97, and Laurie Goetz, ’96—held the prestigious post of SBA president, with many more women playing key leadership roles including six who were moot court board presidents during this time.

These and other talented women graduates from the ’90s are now major players in the legal profession. They are partners, in-house counsels, judges, metro council members and law professors throughout the state, nation and the world. They have continued their leadership roles in the LBA, KBA and the Jefferson County Women Lawyer’s Association.

The Present

The new millennium began with a bang. In fall 2000, Laura Rothstein was named the school’s second female dean, and for the first time in the school’s history the number of women students exceeded men. This remained true in both 2001 and 2002.

It appears that enrollment has become equalized and, unlike women of past generations, female students no longer feel isolated in the classroom. Although there still are challenges, women graduates from the Brandeis School find entry into the once exclusive men’s club much easier.

Women participate in many extracurricular activities, including the Briefing Service, the Journal of Family Law, Legal Aid and Kappa Beta Phi Sorority officers, pictured (left to right), are Joyce Ferris, Dorothy Cox, Professor Joseph Johnson, Helen Viney and Barbara Buchanan.

Professor Jacqueline Rothschild Konovitz, a 1967 graduate, begins her academic career teaching property, trusts, negotiable instruments and insurance. She is the first woman to be awarded tenure at the law school.

Laura Douglas, the law school’s first female African American student to graduate.
MAKING A DIFFERENCE IN GOVERNMENT

REMEMBERING THE WOMEN OF THE '50s

In the '50s and '60s, when women law graduates had difficulty breaking into the private sector of the legal profession, they often found positions with state and local governments. Edith Fitzwater Stanley, Estelle Gordon Cohen, Gemma Harding and Lucille Baker Hurt Robuck—all graduates of the early '50s—are good examples of such women.

Stanley, a 1950 graduate of the Jefferson School of Law, was appointed Jefferson County's assistant attorney in 1964. A Courier-journal article on the appointment did not describe her accomplishments but rather, in the very first paragraph, explained that her deceased father-in-law was a Court of Appeals commissioner.

Cohen, '51, left Kentucky shortly after graduating. After caring for children for a number of years, she took the New Jersey bar and, following her admission, went to work for the New Jersey inheritance tax department. In 1972 she was given a lifetime appointment as a workers compensation administrative law judge with the state's Department of Labor.

Harding, '51, found that getting in the door to practice law was difficult. In conversations with Professor Kathleen Bean she noted, "Law firms really didn't want to rent me an office space or anything... They'd let me be a secretary, but that [was] it."

Harding practiced with Stanley for a time, but in the mid-'60s joined the Kentucky Labor Cabinet where she remained for 20 years, retiring as deputy general counsel for appeals. It is believed that she argued more cases before the Kentucky Supreme Court than any other attorney in the state.

Following graduation from law school, Robuck, '52, was a social worker at the Louisville and Jefferson County Children's Home and, later, a probation officer in the juvenile court. In 1963, Gov. Bert T. Combs appointed her to the Kentucky State Parole Board where she served for nearly 15 years.

Robuck's law training and experience ultimately led her to a faculty position at the College of Law Enforcement at Eastern Kentucky University.

RECENT GRADUATES MOVE METRO GOVERNMENT FORWARD

Brandeis Law graduates are among the leaders who are aiding in the transition to a new metro government for Louisville in Jefferson County.

Ellen Call, '93, has spent a good part of her professional life involved in politics. She worked on a gubernatorial campaign in 1995 and for Rep. Anne Northup in 1997. Last November she was elected to the new metro council and will play a significant role in the formation of the new government.

Carol Kunk Butler, '77, also will play a role in the new government as senior assistant to the mayor for community relations and events. Since 1980-1982, she also served state government. She was the first woman general counsel to a Kentucky governor, John Y. Brown Jr.

Barbara Buchanan Lewis, a 1962 graduate, is the first woman dean of the law school, serving 1982-1990. She continues to serve as a member of the teaching faculty.

Associate Justice Sandra Day O'Connor, first woman to serve on the U.S. Supreme Court, receives the Brandeis Medal.

Laura Rohrstein is appointed dean of the law school.

U.S. Supreme Court Associate Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg receives the Brandeis Medal.
BRANDEIS GRADUATES
BECOME LEADERS IN CORPORATE AMERICA

In the early days, some Brandeis women found corporate life more welcoming and professionally rewarding than private practice. Throughout the '70s, '80s and '90s, top women graduates rose in local and national corporations.

Some chose corporate life because other avenues were closed to them. Others began in private practice, but moved in-house—in some cases their firm's clients lured them away. A few of their stories are included here to illustrate the corporate work that Brandeis women are doing today.

As a student, Louise Lancaster, '72, tried without success to find a summer clerking job at a law firm. Her story was all too familiar in those days.

"After knocking on almost every door in town, I ended up in social services as a typist [she did not know how to type]. The experience convinced me not to plan on a job in Louisville after graduation."

Lancaster ended up moving to Wilmington, Del., taking a position with E.I. Du Pont. From a rather discouraging beginning, she climbed the corporate ladder. She was the first woman senior counsel and the first woman corporate counsel for Du Pont. In 1993 she was named secretary of the board of directors and today she is director of corporate governance.

Following graduation in 1974, Laura Douglas (Jones) joined the legal staff of Chevron USA. She later held positions with the University of Iowa and the Louisville Metropolitan Sewer District. For four years, she served the commonwealth as secretary of the Public Protection and Regulations Cabinet. Douglas returned to corporate life in 1999, when she was named vice president, general counsel and secretary of the Louisville Water Co.

Martha Andes Ziskind, '75, was the first woman in-house bank lawyer in Louisville. Today she is senior counsel for PNC Kentucky.

Margaret Handmaker, '79, worked for a law firm before joining Mercer H.R. Consulting, the world's largest employee-benefits company. Today she is a worldwide partner.

Peggy Heeg, '86, is senior vice president and deputy general counsel for El Paso Corp. in Texas. She oversees the legal work of the corporation's international, exploration and production, petroleum products, field services and pipeline businesses.

Another '86 graduate, Mary Barrazotto, is vice president and associate general counsel at Brown-Forman. She provides legal advice and oversight to the company's wine and Spirits America groups.

Martha J. Hasselbacher
COUNSEL MAJOR HEALTH-CARE CLIENT
AND FINDS TIME FOR PUBLIC SERVICE

Following graduation in 1990, Martha Hasselbacher practiced at Stites and Harbison where she was a member of the firm's litigation and health-law sections. After eight years, she left private practice to join Norton Healthcare as corporate counsel, she was promoted to her present position of general counsel, vice president and legal services officer in 2000. Norton Healthcare is Louisville's third largest employer with over 9,000 employees, seven hospitals and 150 physician practices. Hasselbacher also serves as secretary of Norton Healthcare and its subsidiary corporations. She supervises numerous projects with outside counsel and is responsible for the in-house legal department (four attorneys—all women) and the risk management and workers compensation departments. She also oversees the insurance for the corporation, the employee benefit plans and the self-insured liability trust.

Hasselbacher has been an active volunteer, winning both the KBA Donated Legal Services Award (1996) and the Louisville Bar Association Pro Bono Service Award (1997) for her work with victims of domestic violence and her service with the LBA Pro Bono Consortium. She has been a long-term board member of the Louisville Bar Foundation, board member and president of the Legal Aid Society, board member and president of the Louisville Bar Association, and a member of the Brandeis School of Law Alumni Council.
A FAMILY OF LAWYERS

For many women, being a lawyer has been a family affair. Some were inspired by a lawyer-parent (usually a father); others practiced or went to law school with their husband. And as women entered the profession in greater numbers, their children and grandchildren began to follow.

Olga Sapp Peers, '51, was trained as a teacher, but following her marriage she began working in her husband Milburn's office and her interests shifted to law. After the birth of their second child (they had six), Peers enrolled in law school and later practiced with her husband. She described her experience, saying, "I practiced law with my husband who would make the court appearances. I did all the preparation and the research. After his death in 1970, I found that I had no trouble making court appearances. In fact, I rather enjoyed them."

Saying that she "enjoyed" court appearances is a bit of an understatement. In 1978 Peers was appointed to the Jefferson Circuit Court bench, where she remained until her retirement in 1990 (Ground Hog Day to be precise).

Mary Jane Mansfield Karem, '48 Jefferson, also practiced with her husband. After graduating from college she began working for the telegraph company. In 1936 she married Fred Karem, a prominent lawyer in Louisville. Following the birth of their first child (they had four), she enrolled in the Jefferson School of Law at night. She joined her husband in the practice—the firm's name was Karem & Karem. Fred Karem died in 1960, but Mary Jane continued to practice. Later her two sons—David, '69, and Pete, '68—joined the firm.

The Morton family also has strong ties to the law. Robert McCree머 Morton was born in 1885 and "read the law," as was common in that day. He was admitted around 1914 and began his practice in Louisville.

He apparently had quite an influence on his children. Three daughters graduated from the U of L School of Law. Virginia Morton O'Leary began first, but dropped out for a period. Later Donna enrolled and Virginia returned; both graduated in 1971. Catherine Morton Ward, the youngest, graduated in 1989.

Today, Catherine practices in Louisville, Virginia, whose daughter also is a lawyer, practices in Oakland City, Ind. Donna, who later went to divinity school, is an administrator with Neighborhood Place-Bridges of Hope and is a church pastor.

There are three generations of lawyers in Barbara Reid Hartung's family. Her father, John L. Reid, graduated from U of L in the '40s. Following college, Hartung worked as an insurance claims adjuster and became interested in the law. She enrolled in U of L in 1978 and, following her graduation in 1981, took a position with Greenebaum Doll & McDonald. Today Hartung is a partner at Greenebaum in its health-care and insurance group. Her daughter Karen actually lived through law school twice—one as a child (when her mother was in school) and again as a student. Karen graduated from Brandeis in 1996 and is an insurance lawyer at Humana.

Tracy Elizabeth Shipley, a third-year Brandeis student, was inspired to attend law school by her grandmother, Elizabeth McClure Shipley, '77, "I always thought it was cool that she was able to have a family (six children!) and then go back to law school," she explains.

Upon graduation this spring, Tracy hopes to follow in Elizabeth's footsteps and do community advocacy work.†
Prior to the mid-1970s, there were oodles of “Perry Mason” types occupying the courtrooms, but scarce were the “Mary Masons” in the field of criminal defense. Although the number of women graduating from the University of Louisville School of Law were few, several distinguished themselves as pioneers in a career traditionally and historically dominated by men.

None of these four women considers herself a “pioneer,” but it is clear that each broke through the traditional barriers and paved the way for women practicing criminal defense law today.

Amelia “Mikki” Adams, ’74, was the first woman hired as an assistant public defender in Jefferson County and is now in private practice. Pamela Greenwell, ’75, also a lawyer at the Jefferson District public defender’s office in those early days, is now a partner at Seilier & Handmaker LLP. Sheila A. Collins, ’75, a former assistant public defender and a former assistant county attorney, now assumes the duties of district court judge in Jefferson County.

Bette J. Niemi, ’76, advocated for clients at the Department of Public Advocacy and the Jefferson District Public Defender’s Office and was in private practice for a period of time. Currently she holds the position of capital trial branch manager for the Kentucky Department of Public Advocacy.

These women took on difficult work, representing those individuals charged with sometimes horrid acts. To add to the pressure, they experienced situations fraught with blatant, insulting, sexist attitudes by those around them.

Niemi recalls, “It was lonely. Women criminal defense attorneys were viewed as an oddity, an anomaly every time we walked into a courtroom. We were treated like objects instead of people. In order to succeed you had to put your armor on each time you walked into a courtroom.”

She recalled the first time she appeared in court on a case out in the state. The judge called her to the bench and made his feelings clear: “Lookie here little lady, I don’t think women have any place in my courtroom, but I know I have to let you be here.”

Mikki Adams experienced the same type of treatment, recalling that as an intern she went to file a motion and had to endure the comment that “those are the best legs I’ve ever seen in my courtroom.”

Her reaction? “I wished a hole would open so I could disappear. How can you respond to something like that?”

Along those same lines, Sheila Collins shared the time when she was at motion hour (the only woman among a plethora of men) when a judge gleefully declared: “Well, aren’t you cute? Isn’t she cute, guys? Could I adopt you?”

She couldn’t remember exactly how many shades of red she turned, but she’ll never forget that moment.

Pam Greenwell was proud of her forthright, strident manner when conducting adversarial hearings in the courtroom. After one hearing, the prosecutor proclaimed: “Well, did you strap on your jockstrap this morning?” She was, of course, appalled by the comment.

These women endured comments about their clothes, their bodies, their “masculine” styles, but all shared one common goal: to be the best attorneys they could be, to fight for their clients’ rights regardless of the chauvinistic attitudes that were so prevalent at the time.

As Niemi put it, “I wanted to be the best attorney I could be, not the best female attorney.” Collins added, “You just did the best you could and tried to ignore the comments,” while Adams admitted, “It was scary entering this field and trying major felony cases with no experience and with no one backing you up.”

None of these women had female role models and any networking opportunities were practically nonexistent.

Although subtle forms of sexism still exist in the courtroom, women have come a long way. Thanks to lawyers such as these who blazed the trail for the next generation of women criminal defense attorneys, women continue to succeed in the courtroom. They should be applauded for their diligence, passion and perseverance.

The defense rests. ✪

—Patricia L. Echsner, ’92
Upon graduation from law school in 1991, Angela Hendricks Davis practiced in Louisville, but in 1994 she began a year studying Chinese at the Defense Language Institute in Monterey, Calif. After completing an L.L.M. at Columbia, Davis joined Paul, Weiss, Rifkind, Wharton & Garrison in New York and moved to the Beijing office in 1998. As a senior associate, corporate/China practice, she served as lead counsel to numerous foreign multinational Fortune 500 companies. As one of the only internationally trained litigation lawyers based in China, Davis represented clients in informal and formal dispute resolution including several foreign companies in arbitration proceedings before the China International Economic and Trade Arbitration Commission and the Beijing Arbitration Commission. In 2001 and 2002, China Law & Practice named her a "leading lawyer" in Chinese law. Currently Davis is working at the embassy in Beijing for the U.S. Department of Commerce, International Trade Administration, Market Access and Compliance Division monitoring China's WTO implementation. Like many other women lawyers profiled here, Davis has found pro bono work extraordinarily rewarding. She represents Smile Train, a nonprofit organization dedicated to the eradication of cleft lips and pallets worldwide. Smile Train is funded primarily by Charles Wang of Computer Associates, with active support by former President George Bush and others. Davis notes, "As lawyers we rarely know that we have had a positive impact on someone's life, but when you see a 5-year-old child smile for the first time, you know God is at work and that we can serve a purpose."

'Firsts' in the Judiciary

Judge Janice Reed Martin, '80, has been on the Jefferson District Court since 1992. She was the first African American female judge in the state.

Judge Sara Walter Combs, '79, was the first woman to be appointed to the Kentucky Supreme Court. She later was elected to the Court of Appeals, a seat she has held since 1994.

Judge Ellen Ewing, '72, served on the Jefferson Circuit Court bench 1984–1998. She was the first woman to sit on the former juvenile court bench in Kentucky.

Judge Denise Guess Clayton, '76, was the first African American woman to sit on the Family Court and the Circuit Court benches in Kentucky.

Judge Olga Sapp Peers, '51, in 1978 became the first woman to be appointed to the Circuit Court in Kentucky.
THE DOORS OPEN

WOMEN JOIN FIRMS AS ASSOCIATES AND PARTNERS

In the '50s and '60s few women engaged in private practice, and those who did tended to be sole practitioners or to practice with a spouse or other family member. Law firms, large and small, did not welcome women.

In the late '70s, however, things began to change. At the suggestion of Professor David Leibson, '69, Ann Oldfather, '75, applied for a position at what is now Wyatt Tarrant & Combs. She was hired and became the firm's first female associate; six years later she would become a partner.

Oldfather was a “first” in many ways, but in the years that followed her hiring others would quickly follow. By the early 1980s most of the 20 largest firms in Louisville had hired at least one female associate. Brandeis graduates Dorothy Pitt, '78, Peggy Lyndrup, '79, and Margaret Keane, '82, became associates at Greenebaum Doll & McDonald, and Elizabeth Ulmer Mendel, '82, went to Woodward Hobson & Fulton.

Many of the women who joined firms in the late '70s and early '80s would later become partners and assume other leadership positions with their firms. According to Business First, Cindy Stone '82 was the first female managing partner in Louisville—at the time she was with Seiler & Handmaker. Others, such as Lyndrup, chair large practice groups within their firms.

Although some women remained with large law firms, others would leave to establish firms of their own. In 1984 Oldfather left Wyatt. She had a wonderful experience and had lots of good friends and mentors there, but wanted to start her own firm and engage in a different kind of practice. Stone also would strike out on her own, forming Stone Pregliasco Haynes Buba with two other Brandeis women, Dee Pregliasco, '77, and Vicki Buba, '95.

Today, women who graduate from the Brandeis School of Law have choices that were not even dreamed of 20 years ago, and they have many extraordinary women role models to follow.
Thanks to All

A Message From Associate Dean Linda Sorenson Ewald

The Women's History Project was conceived nearly two years ago. We wanted to celebrate the history of women at both the Brandeis and Jefferson schools of law, and we hoped to bring female graduates back to the law school—to reengage them with their school and their colleagues. But we wanted to do more than remember the experiences of women; we wanted to record those experiences so that future generations would know of their struggles and triumphs.

Over the last few months we have worked with the Women’s Reunion Steering Committee to plan both the reunion event and this publication. We appreciate all those who participated in the planning and shared their time and talents to help make this project a success.

We especially are grateful to Professor Kathleen Bean who, in 1993, interviewed 20 Kentucky lawyers—women who graduated in the early 1950s and before. She had the vision to recognize the importance of preserving their experiences, and we are deeply indebted to her for her work. She has shared her interviews and they are incorporated throughout this publication.

We also appreciate the many women graduates who responded to a survey we distributed earlier this year, asking them to recount their experiences about law school and entry into the profession. Their stories, like those collected by Professor Bean and others, embraced a wide range of emotions—they were funny, sad, infuriating, heartwarming and, above all, inspiring.

Professor Susan Hanley Kosse, a 1991 Brandeis graduate, deserves special recognition. She reported on the “women of the ‘90s,” gathering background materials, photos and interviews. More important, she brought energy and enthusiasm to this project and inspired us all. Patricia Echsner, ‘92, collected wonderful stories of women pioneers in the criminal defense field and helped us preserve those experiences for future generations.

We also appreciate the generous support of the Louisville Bar Association for providing current photos of many of the women featured in this publication.

Finally, we would be remiss if we failed to acknowledge the talents of the staff at the University of Louisville—Tom Fougerousse, our university photographer; Amy Abrams, designer; Laurel Harper, copyeditor; Carole Wastog, ‘96, director of academic support and statistical expert; and Simone Beach, special events coordinator at the Brandeis School of Law.

And to all those in University Archives, especially Tom Owen and Sherri Pawson, we say “thank you” for helping us find and preserve our history.

My only regret is that we could not include each and every story, in the teller’s own words. We hope, however, that we were faithful in our telling of women’s experiences and that collectively the face of each woman graduate is reflected in some part of this history.

References:

Kentucky Writers’ Project of the Work Projects Administration, A Centennial History of the University of Louisville (1939).
Vince Staten, Law at the Falls (2000).


Kathleen S. Bean’s interview transcripts are housed in University Archives at the University of Louisville Ekstrom Library.