

As the youngest of four girls, I never really gave it any thought. My mother always told me girls could do anything that boys could do . . . and better. She told me to keep that last part to myself so as not to make any boys feel bad. (*Sorry for spilling the beans on our secret, Mom*). I grew up believing that I could achieve anything I set out to achieve. Nothing or no one could get in my way so long as I believed in myself. I always had a passion for writing and public speaking. During my junior year of college, I landed a job as a television news reporter. After graduation, I worked on-the-air in Youngstown, Steubenville, Wheeling and finally, Cleveland, at WEWS - Newschannel 5. If anything, being a woman seemed like an asset to my career path. When I decided to expand my passion to law, I didn't think twice about the issue of gender. And indeed, in law school, gender was not an issue. Almost half of my graduating class at Cleveland-Marshall College of Law in 1997 was female.

It wasn't until I entered the profession, that I realized that gender might be an issue at times. It wasn't something that smacked me in the face. It was a gradual realization . . . an occasional comment here, an incident there. I started to notice my male colleagues had a much easier time of being "brought up" . . . afternoons where the male partners invited all the male associates to go golfing with co-counsel while all the female associates remained back at the office. We did not say anything, but we noticed.

Then there was my first solo jury trial. It is one I will never forget. I started to get an odd feeling that it was going to be different for me than the male defense lawyer when at the start of *voir dire*, the judge asked me if I was married . . . right there in front of the jury. And it was the way he said it. I heard the men on the jury panel chuckle. From there, it got worse. At one point, I was in chambers arguing a motion and he actually said, "Honey, you're much better off if you just sit there and look pretty." I didn't know how to respond. From there, it just got worse. My clients' son happened to be an out-of-state federal judge. He came to watch one of the days. We got called back to chambers and the son/judge came along and introduced himself. Without hesitation, our judge smiled and said, "Well, it's good to see that they have someone advising them." (Note: This wasn't 1873, but more than 125 years after the first woman was admitted to the practice of law in Ohio). I actually thought about quitting law that week. It was the worst experience of my career and one I hope no other young woman ever must endure.

Fortunately, it was right around that time that I was asked by Steven Steinglass, the Dean of Cleveland-Marshall College of Law to help put together a video documentary on its first 100 female graduates for Women's History Month. "Sure Dean, when's Women's History Month?" In one of our planning meetings, I distinctly remember hearing a distinguished female judge and committee member comment, "I think the problem with the young female lawyers of today is they think they don't need each other." As a young female lawyer, I thought to myself how dare she? How could she say that?

That comment inspired me to get involved. I joined the Ohio Women's Bar Association (OWBA) and ultimately, served as President in 2007. I became an advocate for women supporting women in the profession. This included in trial work, becoming a member of this Women's Caucus.

Many years have passed since I started on this journey as a female trial attorney and boy, have things come a long way and yet, we still have much to do. My husband and law partner covered a final pretrial for me last week. The male defense attorney commented about his partner's poor relationship with me and said something to the effect of . . . "I have to admit that I don't think she'd get the same treatment if she were a guy." While I know disparate treatment still exists, his comment was a reality check that it still exists for me . . . even after 20 years.

The powerful #METOO movement of this last year has caused all of us to reflect. I believe #METOO is having a positive ripple effect on our profession. I am so inspired to see women uniting forces and supporting one another. It is so important.

This year, I am proud to serve as the Women's Caucus Chair for OAJ. I will do my very best to keep up the momentum to unite our group and inspire everyone to look at things with a different eye and hopefully a new mindset. Over the years, I have had both young male and female lawyers ask me, do you really think your involvement in these non-chargeable activities is worth all your time? My immediate response was absolutely "yes." Each of us has an obligation to give back to our profession. Connections define the level of your success. I want to be part of a team where I am reminded to demand the ball, to champion one another, to lead from the bench, and make failures our fuel.

My involvement with Cleveland-Marshall's video documentary, "Remember the Ladies" – so many years ago certainly changed my outlook on the practice. Most importantly, it made me realize that as a woman – no matter how confident, intelligent or head-strong – you cannot achieve full success alone. Like the first generation of trailblazing female lawyers, women must support women. . . period.

Whatever you want to call it – a network, a team, a sisterhood, a #METOO movement – you need it. Get involved with our Women's Caucus. Supporting women in the practice is so very important regardless of your gender. Spread the word.

(And just in case someone was wondering . . . March is Women's History Month. And my Mom was right – girls can do anything).