



Self Evident

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SUMMER 2009 PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

Plans are well under way for NCAWA's 2009 Annual conference. There is plenty of excitement with this conference, not only because we have the opportunity to meet and network with our South Carolina colleagues but also because the featured speaker is retired Justice Sandra Day O'Connor. I hope that many members will plan to convene in Charleston and hear Justice O'Connor discuss her unique status on the Supreme Court. We expect this to be an excellent conference and a sell-out event, and I would encourage booking hotel reservations and registering for the conference promptly.

About eight years ago, I was a speaker at a career day at a rural elementary school in Eastern North Carolina. A range of us adults were there to talk to 5th graders about various professions. I hadn't been scheduled to attend this event but my colleague had a scheduling conflict and so he asked me to attend in his stead. We were told to bring "props" of the profession, in order to engage the lively young audience, and so there I was with my not-so-interesting lawyer props: pen, yellow legal pad and briefcase. Turns out that lawyer props cannot compete with other professions' props. The police officer had a nifty fingerprint kit and handcuffs; the veterinarian brought a puppy and the race car driver arrived in his colorful race car.



Before I could even begin my presentation, one of the female students blurted out, "you're a girl lawyer!". After my initial shocked reaction, I was chagrined. This girl, as well as her classmates, was genuinely surprised to see that a woman was an attorney. The girl said something like, "you mean I could be

a lawyer?" Of course, I explained to the kids that both women and men were attorneys and that nowadays, many women are lawyers and I gave the girls-can-be-anything-they-want-to-be spiel. That event has always stood out in my mind and made me far more mindful of the strong, gut-level biases both within the profession and in the public that lawyer = man.

I am not suggesting that perceptions about gender in the profession haven't shifted, even dramatically, since Justice O'Connor joined the Supreme Court as its first female justice; there have even been real shifts about perceptions in the eight years since I talked to that elementary school class. The sheer numbers of women entering the

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

IN THIS ISSUE

President's Message.....	1,2
Members in the News.....	3
Committee Reports.....	4,5
Chapter News.....	6
Historian's Note.....	7
In Memoriam.....	7

PRESIDENTS MESSAGE

CONTINUED FROM PREVIOUS PAGE

legal profession have increased dramatically since Justice O'Connor joined the court and women continue to lead and make significant inroads into all levels of our profession. I am proud to say that NCAWA continues to play a major role in supporting women's career and leadership development and it remains a significant focal point of our organization. The more we see capable, intelligent women in prominent positions in our communities and in the legal profession, the less we will hear the terms "lawyer" contrasted with "lady (or girl) lawyer" or "judge" with "lady judge". These terms look silly in print but we've all heard them and winced.

In 1981, Sandra Day O'Connor became the first woman to serve as a Justice on the United States Supreme Court. Since then,

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Ruth Bader Ginsburg was appointed Associate Justice (1993) and now it appears that in 2009, we may witness the appointment of Sonia Sotomayor as Associate Justice of the United States Supreme Court. Happily, the face of our profession is changing and along with that, I am hopeful that the internal culture continues to shift and become more inclusive of talented women and minorities throughout its ranks.

That girl from the elementary school class should be just about the age when she would graduate from high school. I wonder if she graduated this spring and what her future holds. I wonder if she ever realized that gender need not circumscribe opportunities, accomplishments or dreams. As the highest court in the land continues to change its public face, I am hopeful that our profession will cease to be partially defined by gender but rather will be defined, more importantly, by our ideas, solutions, advocacy and leadership.

2009 NCAWA SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENTS

ESHÉ COLLINS NCCU

Eshé Collins graduates from North Carolina Central University Law School this year with an outstanding record, reflective of the longstanding commitment she has made to her-



self and her community. Ms. Collins graduated from Spelman College in 2002 with dual degrees in psychology and pre-medicine, and was a visiting scholar to Barnard College and Columbia University. After graduation, she spent the next four years as an educator in the Atlanta Public Schools with Teach for America. She then obtained a masters degree in Urban Educational Leadership, summa cum laude, from Georgia State University, followed the next year by entrance to NCCU School of Law. As a law student, Ms. Collins completed summer internships

with the Children's Defense Fund in Washington DC and Cape Immigration Compass in the Republic of South Africa, where she co-authored book chapters related to the immigration rights of women in South Africa. Her international studies included the course Comparative Constitutional Law taught by world-renowned Justice Albie Sachs at the University of Western Cape in South Africa, who was instrumental in South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commissions following apartheid. She has been a member of the Women's Caucus at NCCU Law and the National Council of Negro Women, and was the Editor-in-Chief of the NCCU Journal of Biotechnology and Pharmaceutical Law. Her volunteer experience includes working with teens, domestic violence victim advocacy, and HIV/AIDS community education. In her application for the NCAWA scholarship, she wrote: "I have arrived at law through exploration, and I come with enthusiasm and the knowledge that has been my own personal choice based on years of consideration. The opportunities provided through women bar associations have designed my path and place

me in a position to accommodate what I anticipate to be challenging years. As I continue to strive for greatness, the continuous growth of my dreams has now become a reality."

KRISTIN COOK ELON

Kristin was chosen by the Elon Law faculty to receive this scholarship based on her academic achievements and commitment to service in the public interest. Kristin is the President of the law school's Public



Interest Law Society and in that capacity has spearheaded two successful fundraising tennis tournaments, the proceeds of which will support students filling public service internships in the future. Along with another law student, she also played a major part this year in organizing our VITA program, which

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