



Colleagues in Law

A Celebration of Alumni Achievement



Michelle Reinglass

Hall of Fame Induction Year: 1993

Western State Class of 1978



1. What is your first memory of Western State?

It's really the people I remember best, many of whom are still my friends; but I do still remember this:

My 1st semester, our Trusts professor habitually showed up late, broke long, and let us out early. He provided limited instruction, and by the time of the final exam, we hadn't covered even half the book. Admittedly trusts was not my strong suit, but I got a failing grade in the class, which bothered me because we really did not receive any instruction. Thus, I wrote a petition complaining about the instructor. WSU conducted a full investigation. They bumped up my grade, and in what they told me was "completely unrelated" to my complaint, terminated that professor. I had a fair tribunal. Justice was served, which is what lawyers do.

2. What is your favorite memory(?)?

Favorite? I have a lot of them. Let me think. The friendships, I'd say. I'm still connected with my friends from law school. The day we took the Evidence final I was certain that I flunked. We were shown a photo of a gun, and I had written about "authenticity". However, after class, everyone was talking about the best evidence rule, so I was depressed the entire holiday break, certain I had failed. But lo and behold, upon return from our break, everyone was congratulating me on winning the Am. Jur. Award. This taught me that I need to think and trust in myself and my teachers. I was very sad when we graduated; I loved law school so much. My classmates and I were all working and going to school at night, which created a strong bond. The ones I most admired were the single working mothers in our class. Western State gave everyone the opportunity to succeed.

3. Of what success are you most proud?

I am fortunate to have had a lot of different opportunities. I often look back on the “negative” things and see them as positives that brought me to where I am. I can’t really single one thing out, but if I had to, it was being elected President of the OCBA – at age 38 the youngest, and only the second woman.

4. What does being in the Hall of Fame mean to you?

It’s a huge honor. I feel very connected to Western State, and it also serves as recognition of our ongoing relationship. I think that all of the Hall of Famers are helpful inspirations to others, so this is an especially nice honor. I have been approached by people who say they have seen my plaque on the wall; so I think it has a positive effect overall.

5. What do you like best about the practice of law?

I was drawn to it because of the prospect of making a difference in people’s lives. I know that sounds cliché, but I can remember all of my cases: from the woman with six kids whose husband left, then ran up the credit cards and stuck her with the debt to pay, and kids to support. She wrote pleading letters to each creditor and worked out \$10 monthly payments to them. However one creditor, Arco, still sued her. I filed a cross complaint, we went to trial and won. Although a small case, I felt it was important. Another one that stands out is a client who was wrongfully terminated when his employer discovered he had AIDS. I handled the case pro bono through Public Law Center. One of the most rewarding moments was in delivering his check, to see him so happy.

I also just love the intellectual challenges of my practice every day, both from my litigation days and today as a full time neutral.

6. What do you like least about the practice of law?

Discovery, and negativity from other lawyers. While in deposition I sometimes needed to go into my “quiet little white “Zen” zone” in an effort not to respond in kind to ranting and raving adversaries. We are all working equally hard, but many lawyers take their cases too personally. We are running the risk of losing the relationship side of things. So I am always encouraging meeting with opposing counsel over coffee etc. in order to listen and understand the other side better. When I first went into practice, lawyers would meet at Reuben’s in Santa Ana, where they would visit and shake hands, and care what was going on with the other side. The lawyers, law schools and Bar Associations have the power to help reverse the trend of “dehumanization of legal practice.”

7. How do you view Western State’s position in the legal community?

I got an absolutely terrific education – *before* they were accredited. I continue to see the personal relationship aspect. The philosophy was about the whole person, and I haven't seen it change really. It was a choice that worked for me, because I needed to work full time and did not want to commute to Los Angeles to attend school. Western State helped me pass the bar the first time and they continue to support their graduates. Truthfully, WSU was a great school in the 1970's, and it has only improved.

8. What do you see as most important/pressing issue in the legal system right now?

Well...: the ability of the courts to function as the third branch of government. I've never seen it as bad as it is now. When I was President of the OCBA, we would hold press conferences to promote civic awareness and educate the public about the importance of the courts. We had joint cooperation from business and consumer interests. Now it's beyond that, the courts are treated like any other business, and it doesn't matter which side you're on politically. The courts and their funding are in dire peril now.