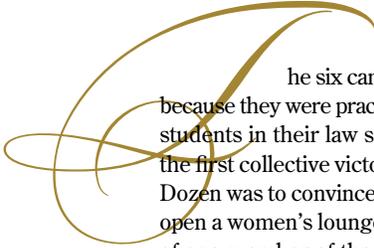


By Genevieve Wong

THE DIRTY Half-Dozen

With smarts, wit, grit, and friendship, a group of women lawyers blazed a trail in the 1960s for others to follow

The six came together as a group because they were practically the only women students in their law school. In 1964, one of the first collective victories of the Dirty Half-Dozen was to convince Loyola Law School to open a women's lounge so that, in the words of one member of the group, "we could put our feet up."

Today, the women of the Dirty Half-Dozen are viewed as true pioneers. The Dirty Half-Dozen became attorneys at a time when there were only 6,000 female attorneys in the entire United States. These six Loyola alumnae, who are close friends, graduated in 1966 and 1967, paving the way for the many other women lawyers who now are making their mark in the legal profession.

In 1969 the group was dubbed the Dirty Half-Dozen by Hollywood composer and musician George Tipton, a husband of one of the group's members. The Dirty Half-Dozen consists of:

- Janet Chubb, a high-powered bankruptcy attorney and a partner at Jones, Vargas in Reno, Nevada.
- Patricia Lobello, an estate planning and probate partner at Lamb, Morris & Lobello in San Dimas. Lobello is a former president of the Italian American Lawyers Association of

Los Angeles County and the Eastern Bar Association of Los Angeles County.

- Lola McAlpin-Grant, the first black woman lawyer hired by the Office of the Attorney General in California.
- Patricia Phillips, senior counsel at Morrison & Foerster LLP, where she practices family law and mediates family and employment cases. Phillips was the first woman president of the Los Angeles County Bar Association and the Chancery Club.
- Paula Tipton, recently retired from a civil litigation practice as a sole practitioner.
- Megan A. Wagner, a retired research attorney for the California Court of Appeal for the Second and Fourth Districts. Wagner worked with several appellate court justices, including Justice Otto Kaus.

"I am extremely proud of each one of these women," says Paula Tipton. "We have really developed over the years, both as women and as lawyers." Wagner adds, "We are most of all a story of friendship. The bond our group shares is the culmination of 35

Genevieve Wong is a writer living in the Los Angeles area whose work has appeared in the Los Angeles Times and the Beverly Hills Weekly.

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The members of the Dirty Half-Dozen on vacation together in Italy, September 2002: (left to right) Patricia Lobello, Patricia Phillips, Janet Chubb, Lola McAlpin-Grant, Megan A. Wagner, and Paula Tipton

years of give and take, ups and downs, heartaches and celebrations.”

In spite of the geographical distances that have separated them since their time together in law school in the 1960s, the members of the Dirty Half-Dozen have managed to get together several weekends each year. (Lobello, McAlpin-Grant, Tipton, and Phillips live in the Los Angeles area. Wagner lives in Orange County and Chubb in Reno.) In September 2002, the women vacationed in Italy. Three years prior to that adventure, they explored Paris together; a trip to Cabo San Lucas to watch whales from Phillips’s beach house occurred between the two European trips. Usually, however, the group is considerably more low-key, opting for shopping sprees at second-hand stores and lounging at Lobello’s beach-side condominium.

When the Dirty Half-Dozen spend time together, the women sometimes reminisce about the old days when, they say, the practice of law was considerably more civilized. They have also been known to suggest personal options—some irreverent and some sincere—for each other for the future or to explore a legal problem one of the group may have in her practice, with each of the five other members bringing a singular legal expertise to the discussion.

REACTIONS FROM THE PAST

All agree that the lot of lawyers, both men and women, is different today than it was in the 1960s. Certainly attitudes toward women balancing their professional careers as lawyers with their personal roles as wives and mothers have changed. Phillips was one of only two in the group to be married during law school and was the only one who gave birth in two of her three and one-half years in law school.

Although Phillips is loath to find instances of gender discrimination in her career, she notes that when prospective employers found out that she had young children or noticed that she was pregnant, they would question how she would divide her time between her family and her job. At the time, there was no such thing as a paid pregnancy leave, now a standard practice by law firms for their employees. To a lesser extent, some firms today are giving their male employees time to spend with their newborn children.

“I keep telling my daughter [who is a lawyer] that she needs to have her family soon,” laughs Phillips, who was pregnant every year that she attended law school. “It’s just a physical fact of life. Don’t wait till it’s too late!”

Tipton recalls that one of the Dirty Half-Dozen’s law professors, who was a partner in a well-known firm, told her, “If my firm hired women, I’d sure hire you.” Wagner says, “I loved it when one interviewer enthusiastically said that his firm had a woman’s position.” Wagner, who graduated in the top five of her class, says, “I never heard from [the firm] but, as I recall, I wasn’t interested in the job anyway.”

Tipton found that in the courtroom female jurors seemed less comfortable than male jurors listening to a woman lawyer. Indeed, judges on the bench in the years when the Dirty Half-Dozen were embarking on their legal careers and for some time afterwards were often confused to see a woman lawyer in their courtrooms. Lobello and Tipton both remember being addressed as “honey” by judges, while their male counterparts were called “counsel.” Chubb once was mistaken for a lawyer’s secretary, and all of the members of the Dirty Half-Dozen were faced from

time to time with a particularly vexing question by court clerks: "Are you the lawyer or the client?" Phillips, who was once called "Patsy" by a judge, adds, "There were few women litigators, and male judges and lawyers did not quite know what to do with us. If a lawyer who was a woman was an aggressive litigator, she was viewed as 'strident.' The same behavior in a male lawyer was viewed as effective representation of his client." The most direct praise, Tipton recalls, came from younger female lawyers who aspired to follow in her footsteps.

Lobello smiles as she recalls the perplexed reaction of the dairy farmers dealing with her employer, Knudsen Dairy Company, when they learned that the company's general counsel was a woman. Phillips remembers being left behind when her male colleagues bonded on camping trips that did not include women.

While these experiences, in recollection, are now amusing, the Dirty Half-Dozen agree that "the universal problem" in their prime earning years was that women lawyers were paid less than their male counterparts. This is not a problem that has been completely solved. In the past, the reason given for the disparity between male and female incomes in the legal profession was that most female lawyers had husbands to support them. Ironically, while Lobello was one of the 15 highest-paid female general counsels in the country when she worked at Knudsen, she was severely underpaid compared to the compensation of the typical male general counsel. "My salary wasn't even in the six figures," she laughs. The only employer guaranteeing equal salaries was the government. Even so, Wagner recalls that "there were few women and certainly no black women" in government legal offices when the Dirty Half-Dozen started their careers.

PERSONAL STRENGTH

Generally, the Dirty Half-Dozen took these events and conditions with a grain of salt. Phillips, Wagner, and Tipton feel that they do not really have "horror stories" to talk about. In reflecting on the issue of gender discrimination, about which she has been questioned many times over the years, Phillips observes, "Most of the time, whether you feel discriminated against is, to some degree, the result of how you perceive yourself. You can't take yourself too seriously and you certainly can't take too seriously the gaffes and comedic reactions of those who can't imagine that a woman could be physically constituted to practice law." She tells the story of the Ninth Circuit Judicial Conference on Gender Discrimination when, in a small breakout group, the subject was the way bench officers



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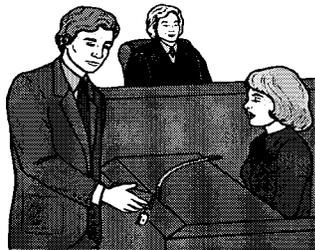
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addressed women lawyers. During the group's discussion, Phillips laughed, "Hell, I've been trying for 20 years to get judges to call me by my first name." The men snickered; the women looked at her reproachfully.

The members of the Dirty Half-Dozen agree that their experiences were unique. They do not deny that the horror stories told by many other women who were law students and lawyers during the years the Dirty Half-Dozen studied law and pursued their legal careers may be more characteristic of a legal profession that had been and, in some respects, still is dominated by men.

"Because of the underlying personal strength of each of these women [in the Dirty Half-Dozen], they probably would have persevered and attained their goals no matter the bars placed in their way," says Tipton. Why the Dirty Half-Dozen escaped some of the severe prejudice experienced by women in the profession is a subject of some speculation. Wagner posits that after the Dirty Half-Dozen had already launched their careers, the explosion in the ranks of attorneys in the 1970s and 1980s might have exacerbated gender bias. She notes, "There is nothing like a little competition to stir up prejudice of any sort." Phillips feels that there were so few women lawyers in those early days of the 1960s that they did not pose much of a threat. As the number of women lawyers grew, instances of gender discrimination seem to have increased as well.

Still, although the women of the Dirty Half-Dozen were good students, none was recruited in law school by a large or even midsized downtown law firm. But again, Wagner, along with Phillips, does not believe that the lack of offers was because of their sex. "Recruiting as we know it today really only began in the 1980s when high salaries for first-year lawyers came along," Wagner says. "In the 1960s, jobs for lawyers were not as plentiful and certainly not as lucrative. People weren't knocking down doors to get us. There were few jobs out there, and it wasn't because I was a woman. There just wasn't a hot market for lawyers." Phillips—who was a member of the litigation boutique of Beardsley, Hufstедler and Kemble (later Hufstедler & Kaus) that became a part of Morrison & Foerster in 1995—adds: "Making the quick buck in your first few years of practice was not high on young lawyers' lists. Loyalty and permanence with a firm were truly the watchwords. I think that firms and potential lawyer employees were looking for something a little different then."

While all six women see the benefit in the gender-blind recruiting that exists today, they acknowledge that the job market seems saturated with lawyers and that, in general, all

lawyers are working much harder than they did in the 1960s. "I don't think it's gotten easier for women lawyers, but it may be that lawyers as a rule are just harder on themselves," observes Phillips. Phillips feels that the advent of women into the profession is at least partially responsible for changing the focus of the profession from litigation to mediation. "People are more concerned with resolving conflict and engaging in mediation, not in creating problems. Resolution is key and the cost of litigation has made alternative methods of dispute resolution more attractive," she says.

MENTORING OTHER LAWYERS

Because of their experiences, the women of the Dirty Half-Dozen find themselves mentoring other lawyers—male and female. During the time that McAlpin-Grant served as dean at Loyola Law School—where she coincidentally taught a sex discrimination law class—she helped bring lawyers to the women's prison facility to provide free legal counsel to inmates seeking divorce. Lobello mentors young women attorneys who locate their practices in the far reaches of eastern Los Angeles County, and she actively encourages these young lawyers to participate in the Eastern Bar Association mentoring efforts. Phillips is often consulted by students and lawyers who seek career advice. She also helps recruit young lawyers into the Los Angeles County Bar Association and State Bar activities.

Chubb and Phillips find that most lawyers who seek their counsel come to them for professional advice that is not particularly related to gender bias. The problems range from expanding their client base to time management and ethical dilemmas. Phillips often finds herself helping others (strangers and friends) find jobs in the legal market. "Unfortunately, I don't have jobs to offer, but I talk with people about how to go about the job of job hunting, help with resume writing, give names of friends in firms that may be looking, that sort of thing," says Phillips, who meets and gets to know every single person she recommends.

Wagner cites the gender bias study that was the subject of a Ninth Circuit Judicial Conference as a catalyst for change in the practice in the federal courts as well as similar studies conducted by the California Judicial Council and the State Bar. Nevertheless, Wagner notes, "Some men just don't get it." She says, "There will always be chauvinists, and women will have to endure the occasional gender-related dig until we start raising our sons differently!" The women of the Dirty Half-Dozen report that all their sons are wonderful and enlightened. ■



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