



Lady Lawyers



By Laura Caldwell

My father calls us Lady Lawyers.

In some ways, that makes sense. When Bill Caldwell attended law school, graduating from Loyola in 1967, there were only two women in his class.

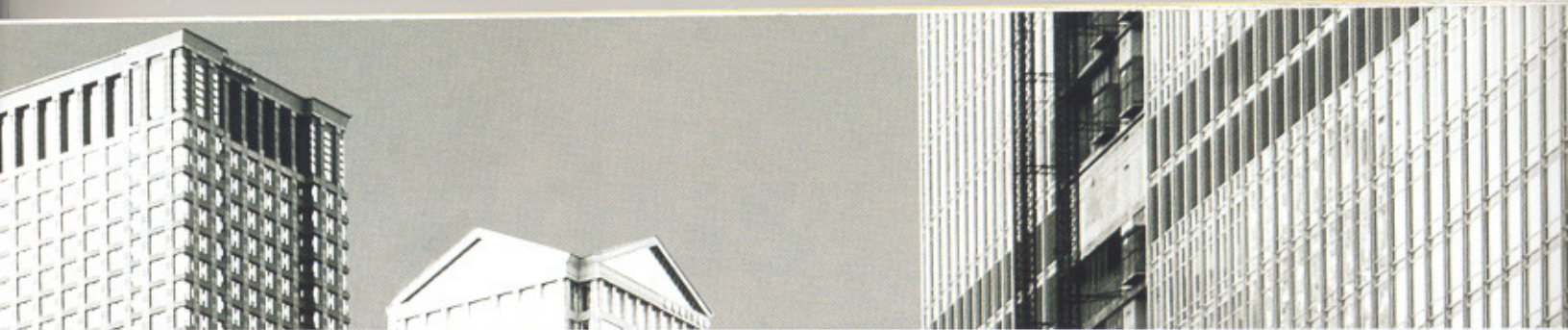
But after I graduated from Loyola's law school, I took the title with irritation. If my father and I were attending, say, the annual Celtic Lawyer's Lunch on St. Patty's Day and I heard the term *lady lawyer* fly from his lips ("Sure, I know Judge Hutchinson. She was one of the first lady lawyers I met,") I would cringe, sending him a look of consternation.

"What?" he would say, baffled.

I believed the term diminishing and demeaning.

Why did a female attorney have to be labeled as such? Couldn't we simply practice law? There was already enough for a woman in the legal profession to deal with. (Not the least of which was that in the early nineties when I started practicing, all the women I knew were wearing panty hose. Every day. No man understands this. Imagine python-like constriction around your abdomen while you're deposing an oncological pathologist about adenomyoepitheliomas.)

Back then, I did everything I could to fit in with the Chicago law crowd, thinking that since most of that crowd was comprised of men, it would help if I dialed down the femininity. I wore pants-suits as soon as I could. I mimicked the way my male partners objected at trial, the way they talked to a jury, a judge, a client. And I learned a hell of a lot.



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But then I joined the Women's Bar Association of Illinois, and I started spending more time with some of the attorneys I met there—Lorna Propes, Patti Bobb, Anne Burke, Dawn Clark-Netsch, Beth Kaveny, Karen Enright, Patrice Ball-Reed, Jeanne Reynolds, Deb Walker, Liz Budzinski and many others. I learned from them that being a woman wasn't something to hide, nor was it something to exploit. It was, simply, something that was *you*. And there was room in our world for everyone, no matter what your gender.

As I forged my way—moving from litigator to law partner to law professor—I realized they were right. Being part of the Chicago legal community is a gift, no matter what your gender or ethnic background. Its capacity to support its members in all their different career incarnations has constantly surprised and de-

lighted me. When I decided to write novels and take time off from the practice, not only did my law partners give me the thumbs up, I was encouraged by every lawyer I spoke to in the city. When I launched the Loyola project called *Life After Innocence*, which represents individuals who've been wrongfully convicted and later found entirely innocent, the community embraced that, too—attending our events and offering to partner with us (firms like Hinshaw & Culbertson, Beerman, Swerdlove and Reed, Smith have been incredibly supportive).

Of course, my father has been along for the ride, someone who has always had my back. And I finally realized that the Lady Lawyer thing is actually a term of respect and that such lawyers are some of the best he's ever seen. So next March, at the Celtic Lawyers Lunch, when Bill Caldwell comments to a colleague that

there are a lot of Lady Lawyers in attendance, I'll be the first to raise my hand with a smile. ■

*Laura Caldwell is a Loyola law graduate and a former civil trial lawyer. She is also a successful novelist and currently serves as a Distinguished Scholar in Residence at Loyola, where she is the director and founder of a project called **Life After Innocence**. Her first work of non-fiction, **Long Way Home: The Story of a Young Man Lost in the System and the Two Women Who Found Him**, will be published this fall.*