

## Letter to a Recent Law Graduate

**D**ear Member of the Class of 2017: Congratulations! You made it through law school. The bar exam looms, and it is a difficult test, but you lived through your one L year – and graduated. You have what it takes to pass the bar and to have a successful career. Have faith in yourself – we have faith in you.

I commend you for choosing the law. It is a noble profession, and one where you truly can make a positive difference in people's lives. It is a wonderful opportunity and an awesome responsibility.

Lawyers are counselors. To be an effective counselor, your client has to trust you, and you have to be worthy of that trust. This is why lawyers are held to high ethical standards. It is our duty – and our honor – to meet and champion those standards.

Here's a little advice as you begin your life in the law (and a refresher for newer attorneys).

### **1. "Help, I need somebody. Help!" – Lennon/McCartney**

When you need help, *ask*. As a member of our great Association, never feel compelled to go it alone. Pick the brains of our members – especially those in the Young Lawyers Section. All lawyers have war stories, give useful advice and offer encouragement, but their experience is fresher.

Take advantage of every resource. And when seasoned attorneys lend their help and support, think about what they are doing to help you solve your immediate problem. A mentor is invaluable – learn how to be one. By next year, you will be in a position

to give back to the next class of new lawyers. So be sure to lift others while you climb.

### **2. "The people who don't ask questions remain clueless throughout their lives." – Neil deGrasse Tyson**

Ask questions. Never try to bluff your way through a brief, a motion or a transaction because you don't have the information you need, aren't sure who to ask or are afraid of looking dumb. You are a newbie – you should demand the training and information you need to do your job. But before you ask, prepare. Do your research and frame your questions as clearly as possible. And keep in mind that, while there may be no such thing as a stupid question, there may be a bad time to ask. Be perceptive.

### **3. "The life so short, the craft so long to learn." – Hippocrates**

A life in the law is a lifetime of learning. The more you learn, the better a lawyer you will be. And some of your best learning will be learning from your mistakes.

The law is nuanced, layered and constantly changing. Keeping up will keep your mind sharp. See fulfilling your continuing legal education requirements as an opportunity to learn, to grow as a lawyer and to understand the law more deeply. Be curious. Practice areas overlap, and you will need to understand how all the moving parts work. And, at least sometimes, go to a live CLE program. See it as a networking opportunity. Especially if you practice solo, it helps to get out of the office and talk to other lawyers in person.



### **4. "We . . . have a professional and moral duty to represent the underrepresented in our society, to ensure that justice exists for all." – U.S. Supreme Court Associate Justice Sonia Sotomayor**

Give back. Whatever your area of practice, you have valuable skills that can make a difference for those who cannot afford a lawyer. Our Association is connected with not-for-profit legal services providers across the state, and we can help match you with providers that need your skills. We offer free trainings for attorneys who want to volunteer through our domestic violence and immigration initiatives. To make it easier to volunteer, we recently launched NY.FreeLegalAnswers.org, where low-income individuals ask legal questions online and attorneys answer at their convenience.

### **5. "There's no place like home." – Dorothy**

Home is where you can kick back and get the support you need. No matter how or where you practice – big firm, small firm, solo, in-house or public service sector – you need a bar home. That's where you'll find the kind of camaraderie that nurtures sharing –

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## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

whether it's exchanging ideas and best practices, brainstorming solutions to problems, discussing issues that affect legal practice or just telling war stories. As we grow increasingly reliant on technology to communicate, what we gain in efficiency comes at the expense of personal relationships. That's why a bar home is so important – for you, and for all of us.

As a statewide association, we offer our members a lot: free legal research, good deals on insurance and prac-

tice tools, practice Sections and online legal communities with lawyers in your practice area, discounted and free CLEs and an array of relevant material from e-newsletters to books.

NYSBA has power and reach. We seek your ideas and opinions on issues you care about, and then make our collective voice heard by the state and federal governments. We nurture our relationships with New York's 200-plus local and affinity bar associations and work with them to make sure our

Association represents all New York lawyers.

Most important, we've been bringing attorneys together and building relationships since 1876. It's what we do.

So, welcome! You are the future of the profession I love, and that future is bright.

Best regards,  
Claire

# NYSBACLE

## Tentative Schedule of Spring Programs *(Subject to Change)*

The New York State Bar Association Has Been Certified by the New York State Continuing Legal Education Board as an Accredited Provider of Continuing Legal Education in the State of New York.

### DWI on Trial – Big Apple XVII

May 11 New York City

### Updates and Hot Trending Topics Affecting Insurance Coverage

May 12 Buffalo, New York City

May 19 Albany, Long Island

### U.S. Immigration Law – Where Are We Now?

May 15-16 New York City

### Qualified Retirement Plans

May 17 Rochester

June 8 Westchester

June 13 Albany

June 16 New York City

June 23 Long Island

### Starting a Solo Practice in New York

May 19 New York City

### Representing Licensed Health Care Professionals in the Disciplinary Process

(9:00 a.m. – 12:45 p.m.; live & webcast)

June 1 New York City

### Family Court Trial Institute II: Support Hearings, Enforcement and Downward Modification

June 1 Long Island

### Toxic Tort Litigation

June 1 Long Island, Syracuse

June 9 New York City

### Purchases and Sales of Home 2017

June 5 Albany

June 6 Buffalo, Westchester

June 7 New York City,

Syracuse

June 9 Long Island, Rochester

### LLCs and Corporations:

#### Tax and Legal Planning Considerations

(9:00 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.; live & webcast)

June 12 Albany

### Bridging the Gap – Summer 2017

July 19-20 Albany, Buffalo

(video conf.)

New York City (live)

## To register

or for more information call toll free **1-800-582-2452**

In Albany and surrounding areas dial (518) 463-3724 • Or fax your request to (518) 487-5618  
[www.nysba.org/CLE](http://www.nysba.org/CLE) (Note: As a NYSBA member, you'll receive a substantial discount)



# Women in the Law: Reflection, Celebration and Work To Be Done

By Claire P. Gutekunst

It is my distinct honor to serve as President of this great association and to introduce this special issue of the New York State Bar Association *Journal*, which addresses issues of great importance to women and society and celebrates the 30th anniversary of our Committee on Women in the Law (CWIL).

This Committee occupies a very special place in my heart. I joined CWIL nearly 30 years ago and served for eight years, three as chair. It was where I found my bar home, and I will always be grateful for the opportunity it provided me to address issues of importance to society and to the legal profession, to make lifelong connections with the extraordinary women – and men – with whom I served, and to learn how to lead.

I joined CWIL at the invitation of Ruth Schapiro, the Committee's first chair and the first woman partner at Proskauer, where I was then an associate. Ruth had an exceptional legal mind and was a passionate advocate for women. The Committee's first report, on the status of women – litigants, attorneys, judges, jurors, and non-judicial personnel – in the courts, published under Ruth's guidance, has served as a model for subsequent Association reports and programs on issues affecting women in the profession and in the public at large, including domestic violence, child support standards, gender bias, pay equity, family leave, and sexual harassment.

This report set a very high bar for CWIL's work, a standard it has met and surpassed year after year, most recently with a report, adopted by the House of Delegates, that has provided the underpinning for the Association's lobbying efforts to advance paid family and medical leave legislation.

Every year, CWIL presents its signature Women on the Move conference and other CLE programs to help women attorneys sharpen their skills and advance their practice, and offers networking opportunities for women to meet and help each other. CWIL also works to raise the profiles of women attorneys and judges and to honor their achievements, including through presentation of the Ruth G. Schapiro Memorial Award and the Kay C. Murray Award.

Add the *May Journal* to CWIL's list of accomplishments. This issue covers important topics such as domestic

violence (including so-called "revenge porn"), human trafficking, sex discrimination and harassment, paid family leave and equal pay, diversity in the workplace and in the courtroom, women's suffrage, and the Equal Rights Amendment.

Thank you to the authors who took the time to write these thoughtful and enlightening articles. And kudos to CWIL co-chairs and *Journal* co-editors Susan L. Harper and Ferve Ozturk for conceiving this issue and putting it all together.

In closing, I want to pay tribute to a remarkable woman jurist whose recent passing has saddened – and left a huge hole in – the entire New York legal community: Sheila Abdus-Salaam, Associate Judge of the New York Court of Appeals.

Judge Abdus-Salaam was the first African-American woman to serve on the Court. This made her a trailblazer, but her wisdom, compassion, and commitment to justice throughout her career as a public defender, at the state Civil Rights Bureau and on the bench, made her extraordinary.

In less than four years on the state's highest Court, she has left a justly celebrated judicial legacy. A key part of that legacy will surely be her tightly reasoned opinion in *Matter of Brooke S.B. v. Elizabeth A.C.C.*<sup>1</sup> That decision expanded the definition of parenthood in the context of ensuring that New York's custody and visitation law affords equal protection for all parents and all children.

On a personal note, I was privileged to experience first-hand her keen intellect and calm judicial demeanor in her courtroom some 15 years ago and, as our paths frequently crossed at NYSBA, women's bar association, and Court events, to appreciate and cherish her personal warmth and unfailing graciousness. She gave generously of her time and experience to our Association, to the legal profession, and to the many lawyers and judges for whom she was a mentor and role model.

Thank you, Judge Abdus-Salaam. ■

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1. 28 N.Y.3d 1 (2016).

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CLAIRE P. GUTEKUNST, an independent mediator and arbitrator in Yonkers, NY, is the 119th President of the New York State Bar Association.

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