

An Interview with Elizabeth Barnhard

Susan L. Pollet
Chair of the Archive and
Historian Committee

Q: When and why did you become involved in the WWBA?

A: I joined the WWBA in January 2013 after attending a WWBA program on how to network. At that event, I met WWBA President Lonya Gilbert who encouraged me to join and subsequently asked me to be a Co-Chair of the Intellectual Property Committee. Since I was a teenager, I have been an activist for women's rights. Joining a professional organization with a mission that aligned with my values and the opportunity to collaborate with attorneys to support the WWBA's mission persuaded me to become a member.

Q: Which activities and positions of the WWBA have you participated in?

A: Since 2013, I have been a Co-Chair of the Intellectual Property (IP) Committee. Over the years, the IP Committee has provided programs and written articles for the WWBA newsletter on patent, trademark and copyright cases and practice tips. We also teamed up with Accelerate Westchester to provide members of a panel presenting IP Law for Entrepreneurs.

In 2014, I was asked to also be a Co-Chair of the Awards Committee and have continued to serve on this committee as well. The WWBA promotes its members for public recognition

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by nominating and selecting members for awards given by the WWBA and organizations such as WBASNY, the New York State Bar Association and the American Bar Association. The Awards Committee works diligently to gain recognition for our WWBA members by preparing the nominations for these awards, because these awards and recognition can

help the nominee establish a career, reinforce a request for a better job or higher salary, and provide external validation of the member's work. An unexpected benefit for me has been learning about and obtaining a greater appreciation for these nominees, especially from the letters of recommendation supporting their nominations.

Since its inception in 2016, I have been a participating mentor in the WWBA's mentorship program mentoring Pace law students, typically mentoring at least two to three students a year.

Building up a law practice requires skills not taught in law school. To help our members, I have brought in speakers such as Janet Falk, who gave a presentation on how to be the one reporters

call, and taught us how to write a press release and a media profile.

I was elected to be one of the Directors of the WWBA Board of Directors for the 2022-2023 year, with a focus on furthering the mission of the WWBA in my new role. I hope to continue this work if I am re-elected as a Director for 2023-2024.

Q: What would you like to see the WWBA accomplish in the future?

A: I am deeply concerned about the current movement to strip away hard-won rights. We have seen what the Supreme Court's Dobbs decision overturning Roe v. Wade has unleashed in our country, and other rights and civil liberties are being targeted. It is vitally important that the WWBA stay laser focused on its mission to promote justice for all, regardless of sex, and to advance the social, economic and legal status for women through the law.

We must also continue to expand opportunities for women and to raise the level of competence and integrity in the legal profession, especially now when our democracy is being undermined with the as-



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sistance of lawyers who will fully ignore their oaths to promote claims of fraud in our elections and our election processes that they know are false. We need to prepare the next generation of lawyers for the battles ahead to fulfill our mission.

Q: Please tell us about your legal career.

A: My over 40-year legal career was not straightforward. I graduated from New York University with a B.A. in Biology and worked as a research assistant in different academic research labs in New York City and Boston until I decided to go to law school. In my final year of law school, I was offered and accepted a position at the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, which was subsequently rescinded by the next administration the month I was graduating. We were also in a recession. I found myself competing with experienced attorneys for any job openings that came up. For the next two years, I worked as a temporary law-

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yer on an hourly basis for different law firms.

I finally began working full time for a former New York Assistant Corporation Counsel who had set up his own general practice firm. He encouraged me to take the patent bar exam to be able to represent clients before the United States Patent and Trademark Office to help them obtain patents. You must have a science or engineering degree to take the patent bar exam, but a degree in biology was not considered a qualifying science degree at that time. However, I had enough credits in chemistry, physics, math, and geology to qualify to take the exam.

After passing the patent bar, I tried to develop a patent practice, but quickly realized that I needed to work in a firm that either specialized in intellectual property law or had an intellectual property group to be trained in this specialized practice area. It took a couple of years before I found a small boutique IP firm willing to hire me, where most of my work for three years was trademark and patent litigation. I joined a multi-national law firm where I worked for six years, learning patent preparation and prosecution and being involved in all phases of litigation and appeals of patent, trademark, copyright and unfair competition actions.

All that experience

served me well when I went to work in house as a patent attorney at Wyeth, a global pharmaceutical company. During my 15 years there, I acquired the skills to work with various research, development and business groups to develop and manage complex global patent portfolios for different therapeutic/research areas, to lead multi-disciplinary patent teams, and to provide legal counsel and educate management and scientists regarding patent and trade secret issues and rights and obligations under agreements. I also acquired administrative skills when I managed one of our satellite patent law offices located at a research site.

After Wyeth was acquired by Pfizer, I left the company and came full circle back to private practice. Leason Ellis offered me an Of Counsel position in 2011, giving me the opportunity to build my own practice and to develop and lead the Pharma/Biotech Patent Group. It was a challenging time to start a new practice with the Great Recession unfolding and the pharmaceutical industry confronting the expiration of patents covering their major drug products. I had no book of business when I started and it took several years to build up a practice, with lessons learned along the way. I take great pleasure in working closely with clients to build and protect strong intellectual property portfolios that add value to their businesses. Part of my practice is devoted to helping individuals and small startups identify and protect the intellectual property assets that they are creating and using my industry experience to help them avoid

mistakes that could adversely affect their business.

Q: What advice do you have for new lawyers entering the profession?

A: Your first job will not be your last job. Focus on learning transferable skills. You must invest in your own professional development. Work with coaches, take classes, and attend webinars to learn the soft skills and business skills they did not teach you in law school, such as how to develop business, presentation/speaking skills, networking, effective time management, fostering client relations, what technological innovations will improve your workflow process.

Be curious. Give yourself a half hour each day to read about something new. It will expand your knowledge base, and clients will appreciate that you are keeping an eye on future trends that might have an impact on what they are doing.

Join a bar association (preferably the WWBA!) and get involved with a committee, attend events, and build up a network of attorneys to whom you can turn to for advice, learn from and have fun together.

Most important of all, remember that being a lawyer gives you the privilege of helping your clients, whether they be persons or companies, using the tools of law. Your overarching focus should be on how you can provide value to the client, whether it be addressing their wants and needs or the conflict between their wants and needs, resolving a problem, or fighting for them in court, not

on how many billable hours you can rack up. If you maintain that focus, you will have a meaningful career as a lawyer, one you will look back on with pride.

Q: How have you balanced family responsibilities and your legal career?

A: It takes a team to raise a family and be a lawyer. You cannot do it all without help.

Q: When you are not lawyering, which community activities and other interests do you pursue?

A: Having a child with special needs led me to volunteer in different capacities for many years for Heartsong, which provides creative arts therapies to children and adults with special needs, including working one-on-one with children during music and art therapy sessions, serving on the Board of Directors and the Advisory Board, and co-chairing Autism Awareness at Citi Field.

For over 16 years, I have been involved and now co-lead the WCT Social Action Knitting and Crocheting Group. I created our motto, "Repairing the World One Stitch at a Time." We work

year-round to make blankets, shawls, hats, scarves and other items for victims of domestic violence, cancer patients, the homeless, and families in need. I read for relaxation, but sometimes get caught up in the story and stay up way too late. Most important of all, weekends are family time. It may include chores, but we are all doing things together. ▶