

By Michele M. Jochner

**Chief Justice Rita B. Garman and
Chief Judge Diane P. Wood**

Women of Vast Experience and Professional Accomplishments



This Fall marks a momentous occasion for our legal community: we are witness to two female Chiefs heading our area's two highest courts. The Hon. Rita B. Garman is the new Chief Justice of the Illinois Supreme Court and the Hon. Diane P. Wood is the new Chief Judge of the United States Court of Appeals for the Seventh Circuit. Their stories are ones of success and inspiration, and they have forged new trails for others to follow. It was my honor to sit down with each of these legendary figures and discuss with them the past, present and future.

CHIEF JUSTICE GARMAN IS ONLY the second woman to hold the position of Chief Justice of the Illinois Supreme Court, following in the footsteps of the first female Chief, the late Hon. Mary Ann G. McMorrow. Garman will be marking her 40th anniversary on the bench in 2014, and is presently the longest-serving female judge in Illinois. She has been a member of this State's highest tribunal for the past 12 years, and she will be the Court's Chief Justice for the next three years.

Chief Judge Diane Wood is the first woman to ever hold the position of Chief Judge of the United States Court of Appeals for the Seventh Circuit. Wood has been a judge since 1995 and has served her entire 18-year judicial career on the Seventh Circuit. She will be that court's Chief Judge for the coming seven years.

Garman was born and raised in Oswego, Illinois. She attended the University of Illinois as an undergraduate and received her J.D. from the University of Iowa College of Law. Judge Wood was born and raised in New Jersey until the age of 16, when she moved to Houston, Texas. She attended the University of Texas for both college and law school.

The Law Comes Calling

Neither Garman nor Wood had lawyers in the family, nor did they personally know lawyers who encouraged them to pursue a legal career. Instead, both found themselves drawn to the study of law because they believed that it would provide broad opportunities unavailable through other careers.

Garman knew as a teenager that she wanted to pursue law; she always enjoyed school and education, and thought law school would be a perfect fit. Wood's decision to pursue law came a bit later, after having been accepted into Yale University's highly-competitive Comparative Literature Program. Wood recalls that after concluding that writing articles on esoteric topics was "not what I wanted to do with my life,"

she informed the school 10 days prior to the start of the school year that she had changed her mind and would not attend. She then focused on law, and it became "the answer to all the things I found lacking in the study of comparative literature," as it fully engaged with society and addressed relevant issues of the day.

Garman, who began her legal studies in 1965, faced many challenges in law school simply because she was female. Garman was one of eight women who entered her law school class, five of whom ultimately graduated. Her male classmates largely proved supportive; most of the hostility came from the all-male faculty, who made the women feel decidedly unwelcome. Garman recalls that professors routinely asked the female students, "why are you here taking up a space that a man could have had?" and accused them of "not being serious" about their studies, believing they were there only to "catch a husband." One stark indicator of the novelty of women attending the school was that the women's restroom was a converted men's room. Making lemonade out of lemons, the women decided to decorate the urinals with flowers.

Wood's law school experiences were more positive. She began her studies in 1972, seven years later than Garman. That period made a world of difference. According to Wood, "it was a time of real change" and her class reflected the larger shifts occurring in society. She recalls that when she was a 1L, the class which graduated that year was comprised of less than 10% women. Her own class was made up of 18% women. When she graduated, the incoming class was comprised of more than 20% women. Although she was aware that she would likely face challenges not faced by men in the profession, she stuck with the philosophy that "you just have to be willing to jump in and do it." She recalls a rule she lived by during those years: she vowed to raise her hand and volunteer at least once per class. It was uncomfortable at first, but it helped to build her confidence.

Early Careers

Upon graduation from law school in 1968, Garman continued to face obstacles due to her gender. When she interviewed for a job, she was told that she had an excellent record, but one question was invariably posed: "what do we do with you?" The common belief was that clients would not feel comfortable sharing their confidences with a woman.

It was not until an unexpected turn of events that Garman landed her first job as the Director of the Vermillion County Legal Aid Society. The prior Director had unexpectedly left, and, in order to keep the doors open, the organization immediately offered her the position without her ever having practiced law. The people who came for legal aid did not care about her being a woman; they just needed help from anyone who could provide it. This opportunity opened numerous additional doors. She got to know the members of the Board of Directors, who were distinguished practitioners in the community and who eventually became her mentors. She also appeared in court on a regular basis, and became acquainted with the clerks and judges who were very supportive. After a year in this position, she was approached by the State's Attorney of Vermillion County and invited to join that office as an Assistant State's Attorney handling cases in the family and juvenile areas. The office was small—she was only one of 2 assistants—and over time she started handling other matters, as well. When one judge remarked that Garman should consider joining the bench, that comment planted a seed. After going into private practice for a time, she applied for—and was appointed—Associate Judge.

For Wood, her post-law school career began with two prestigious judicial clerkships: she clerked for Judge Irving Goldberg on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit, and then for Justice Harry A. Blackmun of the U.S. Supreme Court. After a brief period at the Office of the Legal Advisor of the U.S. State Depart-

ment, she went into private practice, followed by a period in academia: first as a professor at Georgetown University Law Center and later at the University of Chicago Law School, where she served as Associate Dean—and was the only woman. She then served as Deputy Assistant Attorney General in the Antitrust Division of the U.S. Department of Justice, prior to her ascension to the bench in 1995. She was fortunate to work with many lawyers—all men - who were supportive and helped to smooth the way with hesitant clients by openly expressing their confidence in her abilities. She recalled that there was often an “awkwardness” with male clients, as they were unsure how to treat a woman who was also their attorney. She did not encounter hostility so much as confusion regarding the roles which were being played.

Ascending to the Bench

When Garman first became a judge in 1974, there were 8 women circuit court judges statewide in Illinois. She found

the male judges to be very supportive and helpful in making her transition to the bench. Garman can recall only one or two instances where the parties asked for a substitution of judge simply because she was a woman. After sitting as an Associate Judge for 12 years, Garman successfully ran for a Circuit Judge position, and thereafter became the Presiding Judge of the Fifth Judicial Circuit. In 1995, she was assigned to the Illinois Appellate Court, and elected to that position the following year. In 2001, she was appointed to the Illinois Supreme Court upon the retirement of Justice Benjamin Miller. She was elected to that seat in the following year, the second woman to do so.

Wood also became the second woman to sit on the Seventh Circuit bench when she was appointed in 1995, joining Judge Ilana Rovner, who had been the sole woman on that court since 1992. Wood recalls Rovner being extremely helpful and supportive.

Reflections on Change

During her nearly four decades on the bench, Garman has served at all levels of the Illinois courts—circuit, appellate and Supreme - and she has seen the practice of law become more inclusive, with women and minorities successfully entering into all areas. She has also observed that there has been an acknowledgement of the important place women have in our society, and noted as one example the development of law which recognizes the valuable contributions that women homemakers make to their families.

Wood observed that during her 18-year judicial career, there has been a gradual but profound change in the way litigation is conducted. As litigation has become far more voluminous, complex and expensive, judges have taken over the role in managing the cases. Wood noted that her own workload has doubled, with the simpler cases washing out of the system because it is too expensive to litigate them and/or

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Goals for the Future

Both Garman and Wood noted that their respective courts function in a collegial way and have a team spirit. Fellow members respect each other's viewpoints when they write separately, and acknowledge that they are dealing with difficult issues which give rise to different points of view.

Garman stated that as she assumes the role of Chief Justice of the Illinois Supreme Court, moving forward on e-filing for Illinois courts is one priority. She wants to ensure that the Court is "doing the best job we can for the people of the State," and, to that end, she is looking to work closely with the Chief Judges and the bar associations to gather feedback on what has been done in the past, and ideas for what should be done in the future. "What we do in the Supreme Court should be reflective of the realities of the practice, while ensuring access to justice and making the court system work well for everyone." Garman believes that the organized bar can best provide input to the Court by calling to its attention issues which need to be addressed, and to help in the development of effective solutions.

Wood is also seeking help from the organized bar during her tenure as Chief Judge of the Seventh Circuit. Wood believes that it is important to promote a fundamental public understanding of the great importance of having properly functioning courts. An independent system of justice is vitally important for the rule of law, human rights, and the business community. Wood believes that the bar associations can help communicate this message to the public, stating that "it is only in partnership with the bar that we can get that message to bubble up to the surface. They are our natural ally in this endeavor."

Advice for Success

Both Chiefs lauded the great benefit of actively participating in the organized

An up-coming issue of the **CBA Record** will profile the two local trial court chiefs—Chief Judge Timothy C. Evans, of the Circuit Court of Cook County, and Ruben Castillo, of the United States District Court for the Northern District of Illinois. Judge Evans was elected to a fifth term in September. Judge Castillo assumed his seven year term in July.

bar. Garman has always been a proponent for bar association involvement, "as these groups give voice to the issues which arise in the practice of law." Garman encourages all lawyers—and especially new admittees - to participate in bar activities, as it "helps practitioners to learn from contemporaries and colleagues, provides mentoring and offers a great source of help and support. It gives important perspective on the real world of the practice of law." Wood echoed these sentiments, observing that participating in any bar association concentrates efforts and gives rise to an effective, collective voice. In addition, "it is a great deal of fun and you meet wonderful people."

Finally, both Chiefs advised to take advantage of all opportunities, even if doing so may be scary. Garman observed that the key is to "prepare yourself, work hard and do not be afraid of challenges or be reluctant to take a chance. The road may not be easy, but be prepared and be open to change." Wood's comments mirrored those of Garman, advising to "force yourself out of your comfort zone." Something may seem so far out of reach, but, the only way to know if it can be attained is to go for it. As Wood advised, "Throw your hat in the ring. It may work out or may not, but it certainly won't work out if you don't ask. You never know what will happen ... Put your name out there." ■

*Michele M. Jochner is a Partner at Schiller DuCanto & Fleck and is also a member of the **CBA Record** Editorial Board*



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