

2013
Lifetime Achievement Award
Presentation
Remarks by Delia Murphy, Esq.

Good evening. I am deeply honored to tell you the story of Mary Jean Gallagher's journey to becoming our Life Time Achievement award winner. It was not a straight line but it was certainly exciting.

Mary Jean was born in Brooklyn, NY. She speaks fondly of growing up in the Irish bars that her father owned but she developed a deep love of animals when her family moved to a farm in the Virginia Hills. She is the oldest of 5 children - 4 brothers - 2 of who are lawyers. She attended Mt. St. Mary's Academy back here in New Jersey and then Trinity College in Washington DC. Mary Jean graduated from Georgetown School of Law School in 1963. She was one of 4 women in her graduating class. She decided on a career in the law because her father, an Irish immigrant had such deep respect for judges and lawyers.

She passed the NY bar in 1963. But she couldn't find a job for 6 months. No one really wanted women lawyers. She ultimately found a position in Chase Manhattan's Probate Department. From there she moved to the law firm of Kelly Dryer. She stayed there 2 years. In her spare time, she is got an LLM at NYU at night.

After a few years she did something incredible but typically Mary Jean. She calls it her going "walkabout". She quit her job at Kelly Dryer and sailed to Europe. She bought a car - Mercedes Benz - and drove around Europe. She found her way to the Internal School of Law at The Hague. Mary Jean was billeted with the family of a Dutch Lawyer. She will tell you proudly that it cost her \$2 per night.

When she decided to come back to the USA after 9 months. She discovered that it was cheaper to ship the car to SF rather than NY. She went with the car to SF and she drove back across the country. Taking jobs when she needed money as a Kelly girl. In 1972 she took the NJ bar and found a place at Pitney Harden Kipp in their Probate Department. There she met Ginny Long and Marie Garabaldi.

Then again something incredible happened. She met Mo McCully and Rosemary Cass. The women's movement was just really getting underway. Mary Jean insists that Mo and Rosemary "radicalized" her. At their urging, she became involved with the Essex County Bar Association. They convinced her become a Trustee, started climbing the chairs and ultimately became the first woman President of the Essex County Bar Association.

In 1976, she left Pitney to open her own practice. She was actually advised by well-meaning colleagues not to do this. They told her no one would hire a woman lawyer.

But ever the adventurer, she plunged in to solo “practionhood”. She found shelter in a small office in Bloomfield with Harold Brown’s building in. She moved with Harold to the location on Brad Street and remained there for 35+ years. Then the next miracle happened. The clients came. All different types but the ones she found most satisfying were the family matters. Rosemary Cass kept sending her divorces. Here Mary Jean found the area of the law that she would love and loves to this day. She found great mentors in folks like Gary Skoloff.

Mary Jean is the model of what an attorney should be. She is supremely ethical. The clients always fascinate her. Just yesterday she said that the stories we hear every day are better than soap operas. She never would even think of churning a case. Her objective is to settle her client’s cases without unnecessary litigation. She can certainly put up a good fight when needed but only when needed. She represents divorce clients with a small family estates but also the rich, the famous and even the infamous. She has former clients who have been paying their bills \$10 at a time for years.

Mary Jean is very generous with her time. Her Pro Bono work has always been varied - she works for individuals and for the good of our profession. There is never a month that goes by that she isn’t sitting on at least one ESP Panel and sometimes more. Over the years, she served on many State Bar committees including Judicial Appointments (everybody remember that?) Ethics and General Council. She has been on the ABA Gavel Committee for 20 years and is an ABA Fellow. She was the recipient of the Family law Achievement Award in 1994.

After 9-11 she took a case through VLJ. A very young boy, 8 year old Justin, lost his mother that day. She worked for Canter Fitzgerald. Mary Jean took on the daunting job of gathering all of the funds for his benefit from many sources, set up a trust and chose the trustee. But after her work was done she continued meeting many times with the child and his grandparents. As he grew, Mary Jean continued to meet with the young man, giving advice, guidance and assistance when he needed it. After all these years, Mary Jean is still working with Justin and his family.

I am sure many of you have Mary Jean stories. And have known her for many years but I have the privilege and fun of having lunch with Mary Jean almost every day for the last 8 years. I can tell you some truly interesting Mary Jean facts. She is a Cat Lady. She is down to two cats now but I am not sure that we will ever really know the true number of strays she cared for over the years. She is a voracious reader - two/ three books a week. Loves Broadway shows. She is a brave traveler - by herself to strange and exotic places. She is a steadfast friend. She still meets former roommates from high school, college and law school in Manhattan for Sunday brunch. She must be a terrific employer. She has had the same secretary, Margaret Cherry, for 20+ years.

Margaret, please stand so all of these folks can put a face to the voice they have heard so many times.

Mary Jean loves movies and is a whiz at the NY Times Sunday crossword puzzle. She loves to talk politics. And we both enjoy a good bit of gossip - some of you have been the topic. We talk about legal theory and how our clients are driving us nuts. Somehow we never run out of things to chat about.

The wonderful thing about Mary Jean's journey to her Life Time Achievement award is the journey is not over yet. I am grateful, as I know you are, that she has no plans to retire. She has said so often "What would I do with myself". Mary Jean has said she has no idea why she was nominated for this award. I think we all know why. Please raise a glass to celebrate a career and a life well lived. But happily this traveler is not done yet.