

LETTER FROM THE CHAIR

JAMIE DURHAM

**MEMBER SPOTLIGHT**
MELODY EAGANMark your
calendars!**EVENTS YOU WON'T WANT TO MISS****DETAILS ABOUT DONATING TO THE SILENT AUCTION**

THE WOMEN'S SECTION

OF THE ALABAMA STATE BAR

Letter from the Chair

In this season of #MeToo, women's marches, pink knitted hats with pointy ears, and the unbelievable courage of women who have spoken publicly their own trauma and most private hurt, I cannot ignore what it means to be a woman -- particularly a woman lawyer. I am constantly amazed by what I see women lawyers accomplish. You are driven, intelligent, highly competent, and organized. You encourage, cajole, and mediate to bring others to consensus, but are fiercely competitive when in the courtroom. You lead firms, courts, and families with strength.

*Jamie Durham, Section Chair*

And yet.

In the courtroom, our most competitive field of play, I often sense frustration, disappointment, and sometimes resignation. Not in response to our clients or issues with our cases; no, in response to the men in the room. How many times have you forcefully argued your point with a male lawyer, only to be told by the judge to "settle down" when your voice matched your male opponent's in volume? How many times have you been called by your first name in the courtroom, or worse, had a "Miss" attached to it as though you were a pre-school teacher? Or had a judge comment on your appearance, either inappropriately or in derision? I imagine we have all experienced some form of these small corrections, these admonishments.

But they are not small, and they are not corrections or admonishments. They are insults, meant to remind us of who we are in the courtroom. These insults – often delivered with a smile – undermine our effectiveness in the courtroom. They diminish us in the eyes of our counterparts. Worse, they often diminish us in our own eyes.

So, how do we as women lawyers handle these situations? More importantly, how do we stop them from happening?

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Persevere. Keep doing your job, and doing it well.

Maud McClure Kelly persevered to become Alabama's first woman lawyer in 1908 and a leader of the suffragist movement in Alabama. Mahala Ashley Dickerson persevered to become the first African-American female attorney admitted, not only to the Alabama bar, but the Alaska bar as well. Nina Miglionico persevered in her fight for racial reconciliation and advocated for civil rights, equal pay, and child labor reform throughout her 73 years of law practice. Ernestine Sapp persevered to become the first African-American graduate of Jones Law School. All of these women persevered through discrimination, harassment, legal barriers, and, in Nina Miglionico's case, a cross being burned in her yard, to achieve racial, gender, and societal parity.

Speak up. Speak up when judges or attorneys of either gender cast these cozy insults your way. Women would never have gained the vote, much less the right to practice law, had not Maud and her fellow trail-blazers spoken up about disparity.

Don't let these comments hang in the air, settling on everyone. Speak up. Sometimes speaking up isn't even speaking; it is signing up to run for office, or to join an organization from which you are excluded, or to be admitted to the bar. Just speak up.

Believe. Believe in yourself, your ability, and your right to stand on your own two heels in any courtroom in the country. Maud and her sisters-in-law had to have experienced the quivering insides and burning faces that come with being derided. Belief that they could do the job, that they deserved to be in that courtroom, that they had the guts and the stamina to keep coming back, must have kept them going. It will keep you going, too.

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Women's Section
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The Women's Section created the Maud McClure Kelly Award to recognize her incredible achievements and to honor the women who have come after her and extended the road for the rest of us. All of the women mentioned above are Maud McClure Kelly Award recipients, and there are many more. The women of the Women's Section applaud and encourage women lawyers who persevere, believe in themselves and their abilities, and who speak up. It shows in the members of our section and in the women they choose to honor. And one day, perhaps it will show in the respect shown to women lawyers in the courtroom.

You're a woman lawyer, dang it – you can do anything, backwards and in high heels.



Member Spotlight on Melody Eagan

Managing Partner of Lightfoot, Franklin, & White LLC

Women's Section Member Melody Eagan took the reins in January as Managing Partner at Birmingham-based Lightfoot, Franklin & White. Melody is the first woman to serve in this capacity, and she was kind enough to sit down with us to answer our questions about her path here and her vision going forward.

Q. I know that you've practiced in Alabama for more than twenty years now. How did you first come to Birmingham?

A. I knew that I wanted to be a trial lawyer, and Lightfoot Franklin was a new, exciting firm that formed right before I entered law school at Vanderbilt. As we were going through on-campus interviews, a friend of mine from Birmingham told me that if I wanted to do high-stakes litigation but live in a mid-sized city, Lightfoot Franklin should hands down be at the top of my list. When Warren Lightfoot gave me my offer at the end of that summer to work as an associate, I immediately accepted, and the rest is history. Now, 24 years later, I guess I'm officially an Alabamian.

Q. Where did you think you would be at this point in your professional career? Was private law practice your longtime goal?

A. When I entered the legal field, I'm not sure what I envisioned as my life plan. I did not have lawyers in my family, so this was a new world to me. That being said, I fortunately landed just where I needed to be. I find being a trial lawyer is very rewarding. You get to help clients navigate through difficult waters and solve problems. You learn something new with every case, and each day is filled with new challenges. And, perhaps most rewarding are the relationships developed with clients, lawyers, co-workers, judges and others. Now, being elected as Lightfoot's Managing Partner is one

of the highlights of my career. I look forward to leading the firm and what the future holds.

Q. How has your practice changed over the past twenty years?

A. My personal life has changed greatly over the last 24 years. During my first decade at Lightfoot, I was a single female heavily focused on my career. I met and married my husband Chris, who is also a lawyer, later in life. I then had my two sons when I was almost 40 years old. So in the last decade, I've had to balance many more balls than before, which definitely has resulted in a concerted, renewed focus on priorities and realization that, while I can't "do it all," I find great happiness by emphasizing those areas in my life that are most important to me.

Oh, and I also sleep a lot less than I used to.

Q. We can certainly relate to that! Has any particularly useful advice helped you navigate your career to this point?

A. I feel so blessed to have learned from some of the greatest lawyers and finest people that I know. While I could probably write a book about all of the sound advice that I have received through the years, one thing that stands at the top of the list is the importance of professionalism in the legal practice.

As lawyers, we should always work hard to represent our clients to the best of our ability. That is what our clients hire us to do, and because we are advocates, we hate to lose. Yet, practicing law is not just about winning. As we hear in the sports arena, "it's not whether you win or lose, but how you play the game." We must always remember that there are two sides to every legal dispute, and our adversaries are trying to help their clients just like we try to help ours. We are all together in this profession, regardless of our side of the "v."

Q. You are the first woman to hold the managing partner position at your firm and one of very few in Alabama. How do you think that firms can encourage diversity and successfully cultivate female leadership in the future?

A. I am proud to say that Lightfoot has always emphasized and recognized the importance and value of women lawyers. I have been blessed to work with amazing

lawyers who cared about me as a person, as well as my professional development. They gave me great opportunities, allowed me to take ownership of cases as an associate, and took the time to provide constructive input on ways to improve. As a result of our firm's leadership and focus, we have an awesome group of women attorneys. We call ourselves "WOLF," which stands for the Women of Lightfoot Franklin, and our group continues to grow every year through hires of talented, strong women. We have women who chair a number of our committees, and my election as managing partner is yet another testament to our focus on diversity.

Q. In what ways can the State Bar, and our Section particularly, empower women in our profession?

A. In my experience, women professionals like to support one another and help each other succeed. That is one reason I think having a Women's Section within our state and local bar associations is so important. Having a community of female lawyers of different ages, who can provide guidance, mentoring and insight to each other, is a key to empowering women in the legal profession. We can encourage each other to step into those leadership roles that are compatible with our own strengths and talents, while looking for opportunities for each other to shine. Excellence in law, or any profession, takes hard work and dedication, and having a network of women who encourage and support each other, who lead by example, and who share their experiences is of utmost importance. And it makes the practice of law a lot more fun too.

Thank you, Melody, for sharing with us. We wish you great success in your new role!

**Mark Your
Calendars!**

We hope you're making plans to attend the Annual Meeting this summer! The Women's Section is co-sponsoring a two-part CLE with the Diversity Committee and Alabama Lawyers Association. Join us!

Remembering How to Listen: A Real Conversation about Historical Monuments and Living Through Change
A Conversation about Growing up in the South

Congratulations to our 2018 Award Winners!

The Women's Section is honored to present the Maud McLure Kelly Award to Alyce Spruell.

This award honors a woman attorney who has made a lasting impact on the profession and who has been a pioneer and leader within the State. Alyce has contributed immeasurably to our profession, from serving as our first female President of the State Bar to mentoring law students at the University of Alabama.

She has filled myriad leadership roles in the State Bar: as a Bar Commissioner, a driving force behind the creation of the Leadership Forum, and chair of multiple committees and task forces. And her service to the Tuscaloosa and University of Alabama communities is extensive.

A recommender summed up Alyce's contributions: "She has personified our motto—'Lawyers Render Service.' And I'm quite sure that she will continue to inspire and encourage all lawyers to do so as well. And, as a result, the people of our communities and our state as a whole will be better off."

Join us for the Maud McLure Award luncheon at the annual meeting!



Pictured from left to right: Allison Skinner, Celia Collins, Martha Jane Patton, Judge Caryl Privett, and Mary Margaret Bailey

The Women's Section celebrated
2017 honoree

Martha Jane Patton

at the Maud McLure Kelly
Award luncheon at the Grand
Hotel in Fairhope



Kathy Miller is the 2018 recipient of the Susan Bevill Livingston Leadership Award.

Kathy is managing partner of Armbrecht Jackson LLP in Mobile. Among her many leadership roles, she has served as President of the Mobile Bar Association, Chair of the Mobile Bar Foundation, the first female president of the Rotary Club of Mobile, Chair of the St. Paul's Episcopal School Board of Trustees, and Vice-President of the Community Foundation of South Alabama.

The Susan Bevill Livingston Award was commissioned to honor a woman lawyer who, like its namesake, has demonstrated a commitment to those around her as a mentor, a sustained level of leadership throughout her career, and a commitment to her community. Kathy has demonstrated each of these attributes, and we look forward to presenting this award to her at the annual meeting, followed by a reception in her honor in the fall.

As one of her many recommenders noted, presenting this award to Kathy “both honors Kathy and honors Susan Bevill Livingston’s memory and example. It is a perfect fit.”

A woman with short, light-colored hair, smiling, holding a large, ornate crystal trophy or bowl. She is wearing a white dress and a necklace. The background is dark and out of focus.

Last fall, we joined Balch & Bingham and Maynard, Cooper & Gale for a reception honoring **Maibeth Porter**, recipient of the 2017 Susan Bevill Livingston Leadership Award.



The Women's Section's biggest fundraiser is our Silent Auction, held during the Annual Meeting.

We are collecting donations until **June 13th!**

Please contact Sherrie Phillips at sherriep@sasserlawfirm.com if you have any items, packages, or event tickets you would like to donate! Thank you for your generous support of the Section and our scholarship recipients!

HUGE THANKS TO WENDY CREW for sponsoring our Judicial Brunch!

Want to join Wendy in supporting the Women's Section this year? We always appreciate sponsors for our CLE program at the Annual Meeting, the Maud McLure Kelly Award luncheon, and the Justice Janie L. Shores Scholarship!

To become a sponsor, return a completed WLS sponsorship form (accessible at alabar.org) to Mary Frances Garner's attention at the State Bar office. Or simply contact any of the officers listed on page 2 of this newsletter, and we will happily help you!