

LAWDRAGON

The Lawdragon 500 Lawyer Limelight: Patty Glaser



A decision to come out West for the first time in her life for a federal clerkship brought Patty Glaser into the Los Angeles legal scene of the 1970s. Glaser found what she calls a “meritocracy” in which she learned from great lawyers and ascended to the top of profession, becoming one of the nation’s most successful and best-known trial attorneys.

Her life feels a bit like the Hollywood stories that brought her fame. A native of Charleston, W.V., she clerked for Judge David Williams, who was the first African-American federal judge west of the Mississippi. She joined the iconic Century City firm Wyman Bautzer and then was a founder of what is today Glaser Weil, where she catapulted to fame suing Kim Basinger for backing out of the film “Boxing Helena.”

Since that star turn, she’s become the go-to litigator in L.A. for business litigation, as well as Hollywood, representing Miley Cyrus, Conan O’Brien and Paula Deen, among many, many others. She was the longtime attorney to Kirk Kerkorian, who left her \$6 million when he passed away in 2015. She met her husband, a former safety for the Pittsburgh Steelers, as a friendly witness.

A wonderful friend and a fearsome foe, she also is a passionate philanthropist, particularly for theater, the judiciary and the Jewish community. She has produced plays and is on the board of the Geffen Playhouse and Los Angeles Music Center Theater Group. She is a member of the Board of Trustees of the National Judicial College. And passionately supports The Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

But practicing law is her true north. “If I weren’t a lawyer, I’d perish,” Glaser says. The Rutgers School of Law graduate is name partner and chair of the litigation department at Glaser Weil Fink Howard Avchen & Shapiro.

Lawdragon: How did you first become interested in being a trial attorney focusing on complex litigation?

Patty Glaser: After I graduated from law school, I clerked for David Williams, a U.S. District Court judge for the Central District of California. I found the complex matters I worked on during my clerkship to be fascinating and that really fueled my interest in pursuing a career as a trial attorney.

LD: What do you like about it?

PG: I find being a trial attorney fulfilling in just about every way possible – intellectually and emotionally. Meeting the client’s needs is the top priority, though.

Every day is interesting and comes with new challenges. I enjoy being presented with a variety of issues and problems.

LD: What types of cases are keeping you busy these days?

PG: So many law firms have become a collection of partner “silos.” Happily, we have successfully avoided that. Every client of “mine” is genuinely a client of the firm and this is true of my partners’ clients as well.

LD: Is there a specific reason why you chose Rutgers over another school?

PG: It may have somewhat been a matter of luck, but for me, Rutgers was a really good fit. The legal education I received there was a mind opener and my analytical thinking improved dramatically as a result of having gone there. I’m much more logical, insightful and incisive due to what I learned and experienced those three years.

LD: Do you have the type of practice you imagined yourself practicing while in law school?

PG: It’s even better than anything I could have imagined, by multiples!

LD: Why did you pursue a career in the law in the first place?

PG: I like walking into dark rooms and finding doors – in other words, I love problem solving.

LD: After American and Rutgers, what brought you out west?

PG: I’d been out of the country a number of times by the time I graduated from law school, but I’d never traveled west of the Mississippi River domestically. I had applied for federal clerkships all over the country and was lucky enough to receive a few offers. One of these was in L.A. with Judge Williams and it was only a one-year commitment.

I loved the fact that the legal world in L.A. in the early ‘70s was very much a meritocracy. It didn’t matter who your family was, what clubs you belonged to – anyone could be successful here and I believe that’s still largely true today.

LD: Was there an early experience or mentor who really helped shape the course of your professional life?

PG: Yes – I was fortunate to have several terrific mentors. When I clerked for Judge Williams, I was able to observe Frank Rothman’s courtroom skills firsthand. After I joined his firm, Wyman Bautzer, I learned a

great deal about trial preparation and trial practice by working with him closely on a number of matters that ended up being tried.

Another partner in the firm, Greg Bautzer, showed me the huge importance of maintaining client relations – he was utterly devoted and loyal to his clients and I learned, among many other things, how critically important it is to respond to every client communication every day before leaving the office.

My third mentor was Mariana Pfaelzer. She was a managing partner at the firm at a time when this was a real rarity. She showed me and many others that there are no limits on what a female attorney can achieve and made it much easier for women attorneys in my generation to succeed.

LD: Can you share a lawyer you have come up against in a case that you admire, and why?

PG: There are a number of attorneys that immediately come to mind: in Los Angeles, Marshall Grossman, Bob Mangels, Pierce O'Donnell, Bert Fields, Bill Shernoff and Glenn Pomerantz; in San Francisco, Paul Nelson. They are all consummate professionals and really terrific trial attorneys.

LD: Do you have any special routines before or during a trial or appellate argument?

PG: Absolutely. I have a number of special routines when I'm in trial. I drive to court the same way each day. I eat the same thing for lunch. I wear the same earrings for the duration of the trial. And I always refuse to comment on how the trial is going.

LD: As chair of the litigation department, are there challenges you face in your current leadership role?

PG: Not really. I'm working alongside the best attorneys I've ever worked with and it makes my practice that much more enjoyable. Because of the caliber of our partners and associates,

these administrative duties are far less onerous and I'm able to devote the great majority of my time to trial work instead.

LD: What do you do try to “sell” about your firm to potential clients – how is it unique?

PG: The firm sells itself because of the high quality of our attorneys. Today clients aren't interested in “law firms” but instead they're interested in particular lawyers. Our firm is an easy sell because I'm blessed with wonderful colleagues.

LD: How do you relax outside work?

PG: First and foremost, I love to spend time with my husband and our two wonderful grandsons, who basically “own” me. We travel together as a family, which is wonderful.

I also particularly enjoy contributing to the legitimate theatre community through my participation on boards of organizations such as the Center Theatre Group and the Geffen Playhouse. I attend theater productions whenever I can and, on occasion, have actually co-produced shows with some close friends.

LD: Please tell us about some of your public interest and community involvement.

PG: Absolutely. Among the other boards I serve on is that of the American Friends of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, an organization I am really passionate about. I also try to support the work of Sharon Nazarian and the Younes & Soraya Nazarian Center for Israeli Studies at UCLA by serving on that board in its efforts to promote the study of Israel's history, culture and society.

LD: If you weren't a lawyer, what would you be doing now professionally?

PG: If I weren't a lawyer, I'd perish.

LD: Do you have a favorite book or movie about the law or justice system?

PG: “To Kill a Mockingbird” is probably my all-time favorite.