

2nd Generation on the Bench

Daughter Appointed to Retired Mother's Seat

By Angela Miller
Daily Record Legal Affairs Writer

As one of the few women at Duke University Law School in 1973, District Judge Sherrie Krauser says she never doubted that she could have it all.

While most of the women in her class saw themselves as trailblazers, paving the way for other women who came after them, Krauser figured she was just following in her mother's footsteps.

"To most of the women in law school, it was very much breaking new ground," Krauser explains. "You were fighting the firms, other law students, and sometimes professors, talking about whether you were really going to be able to have it all."

Krauser, on the other hand, grew up assuming that she could do whatever she set her mind to do. After all, her mother had juggled a career and family with apparent ease, she recalls.

Four months ago, Krauser was appointed to fill a vacancy on the Prince George's County District Court created when her mother, 61-year-old District Judge Bess Lavine, retired.

The National Association of Women Judges reports that this may be the first time a mother and daughter have both held judgeships, let alone the same one.

But Krauser says she doesn't view that bit of legal trivia as a personal accomplishment, but just "another milestone" in the progress of women in the legal profession.

"This just means that, as sons have followed fathers in the profession, now . . . there's a second generation of women coming along," Krauser says.

The younger judge points to her mother, District Judge Theresa Nolan, Circuit Judge Audrey Melbourne and other women judges in the over-50 group as the first generation of women in the legal field, adding that she believes "they're all happy to see the younger women coming up."

"They can say, 'We've done it. We've built a bridge . . . and cleared the path. Now there are more who can come up and their path is going to be a little easier because we were here,'" Krauser says.

Not as similar as they seem

Though the similarities in their careers are outwardly apparent, Krauser contends that she and her mother have, in fact, had very

different experiences in the legal profession.

As an undergraduate at George Washington University, Lavine met and married Irvin A. Lavine, who is now a patent and trademark attorney. Seven years and three children later, Lavine went back to school, taking evening classes at the University of Baltimore Law School.

Krauser, on the other hand, graduated high school at 16 and walked away from Duke University with a law degree at the age of 22. She met her husband, Peter Krauser, a partner in the Cleveland-based law firm of Thompson, Hine & Flory, while working in the criminal division at the U.S. Justice Department in Washington, D.C. Later, she negotiated a part-time position at the Prince George's County Attorney's Office so she could spend more time at home with her children.

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— Judge Sherrie Krauser

"I had a lot of opportunities that clearly my mother didn't have," Krauser says. "And I got my career off the ground and rolling before I had children."

But the 38-year-old judge notes that she started out as a litigator at a time when female litigators were few and far between.

"One of the reasons I started with the Justice Department and not with a firm was that I really wanted to do trial work, and most of the firms believed in tokenism: If you had one woman in your litigation section, that was it," Krauser explains.

"You just didn't need two because there were only certain kinds of cases that they would ever let a woman look at," she adds.

Krauser's mother, however, who says she was turned away from the Prince George's County Bar Association in 1960 because she was a woman, recalls a time when women didn't do jury trial work at all.

See Next Generation, page 10



Phil Rink Jr.

District Judge Sherrie Krauser was appointed to fill a vacancy created when her mother, District Judge Bess Lavine, stepped down last spring, making them the first mother and daughter judge combination in the nation.