



Jeanette R. Wolman

1902-1999

The First Woman Admitted to the Bar Association of Baltimore City

By Margaret Lynch

Jeanette Rosner Wolman was born August 21, 1902 in New York City. She began her pursuit of a legal career during high school in Birmingham, Alabama by writing to the dean of Columbia Law School. The brisk reply she received was indicative of the times and the view of women practicing law. The dean wrote: ***“Columbia does not admit women to its law school. If you are interested in going to college, apply at Barnard.”*** Wolman kept the dean’s rejection letter in her “high school memory book” and showed it to young women attorneys to remind them how times had changed.

This reply was important to show the difference of customs, it did not in any way shatter Wolman’s hopes of becoming a lawyer. Instead she first studied “social science” at Goucher College. Wolman went on to be part of the second class to graduate at the University of Maryland School of Law in 1924. Since classes were at night, she worked during the day as a social worker for the Jewish Children’s Bureau.

When Wolman entered the law school, it was not equipped for women and not completely adapted to co-education. Like her classmate Sarah Burke, Wolman was one of the four “ladies” required to use the facilities of a hospital across the street. ***According to Wolman, even though there was no direct discrimination against the women in the law school classes, there was no communication between the male and the female students.*** Similarly to other women graduates at that time, there were few positions available to women and even fewer women attorneys to share the experience with. According to Wolman, it was not uncommon for female attorneys to be offered jobs as legal secretaries or clerical workers even if they had the credentials of a male; therefore most women who practiced law began as sole practitioners.

In 1927, since Wolman was barred from the all male Baltimore City Bar Association, she and six other women attorneys established the Women's Bar Association. They stated the objective of the Association as "to maintain the honor and integrity of the legal profession, to promote legal science, and to aid the administration of justice, and to advance the interests of women engaged in the practice of law." In 1957 Wolman became the first member of the City Bar Association.

Wolman is credited for the establishment of the first Maryland Commission on the Status of Women by Executive order of Governor J. Millard Tawes. Wolman was appointed as the first chair of the commission and was reappointed in 1986. Wolman took part in numerous clubs and organizations and served as a leader for many. In 1989, she retired from law practice. On her 96th birthday Wolman summed up her career by saying, "I don't think there is anything I haven't done." She was strong in her convictions, and found creative ways to achieve her goals. When told it was so nice she had devoted her life to women's liberation she answered, ***"Oh no, I believe in women's rights. No one—not just a woman—should be held back because of artificial boundaries or limitations."***

Wolman was honored with the Margaret Brent award in 1991 by the American Bar Association. Wolman died in January of 1999, at the age of 96.

*On her 96th
birthday Wolman
summed up her
career by saying,
"I don't think
there is anything I
haven't done."*
