

An inspiration to all women, Laura Legge was the first woman elected as a bencher of the Law Society in 1975 and the very first women Treasurer. She continued to lead numerous other organizations including the Women's Law Association of Ontario and the Federation of Law Societies of Canada. A woman of character and strength and an inspiration to women in this profession. My deepest gratitude to the treasurer, the Law Society and my colleagues for acknowledging me in this extraordinary woman's memory.

Recently, a New York Times obituary began this way-"She made a mean beef stroganoff, followed her husband from job to job and took eight years off from work to raise three children". The "she" that they were talking about was a rocket scientist-and not just any old rocket scientist-a world famous pioneer of rocket propulsion. But that didn't get mentioned until quite late in the piece. The NYT would later apologize- but only after a bit of a furor had erupted.

The living have not fared better. Recently, two women of our Supreme Court, one sitting and the other, the extraordinary Honourable Louise Arbour were introduced at a conference-their domestic skills-from the maternal to cooking - figured very prominently in both of their introductions. As if to say to the audience, it is ok-they have done it all. They've made a mean beef stroganoff- and oh yes, done some lawyering along the way. Somehow this makes them more understandable, more female ...more acceptable.

The first female criminal lawyer in Ontario, Vera Parsons, was admitted to the bar in 1924. Women were not welcomed in the courtroom. Litigation was viewed as unfeminine and not at all genteel. It would be almost 60 years before the first woman would be appointed to our Supreme Court. 1982.

As I see bright, promising young women leave this profession in droves, I ask myself what has changed-since 1924 or 1982 for that matter. And I cannot shake the feeling that as soon as young women enter the profession, we -albeit with the most altruistic of motives-do our best to gently escort them out. With alternative career days, a barrage of work life balance conferences, telling them either choose one or the other- or figure out a way to do it all – is it any wonder that under the pressure of it all-heaped upon them before they have had a moment to breathe in this profession-that these young women immediately begin to question their right or ability to be here.

I wonder whether we keep sending the very same message that was sent in 1924-this is no place for women. Maybe all that we have really done is figured out a little nicer way of saying it. I fear that we have paved the golden path for their exit-with compassion and yes accommodation but not enough effort to inspire, to lead, to encourage, to remind our young women- that yes you have an important contribution to make and we, this profession, needs you. And even more, we will give you the opportunity to shine.

So listen-this was the speech I was going to give my young daughters from the moment that they were born. But I had two beautiful boys. So here is my promise to you-I promise to give them this very same speech and hope that one day, knowing all this, they will provide the strength and support to their partners that my husband, Glen Jennings, has to me.

There are a few people that I wish to thank.

Thank you to Anne Weinstein, who travelled from Ottawa today and thank you for supporting me in this award.

To Eddie Greenspan, always and forever my legal hero. While no one would accuse him of accommodating – he did so much better-not once did he say to me take the edge off, be softer, be less aggressive, be less tough. To the contrary. He encouraged. And he let me be who I am, on my own terms, in this profession.

And to Justice Rosenberg, my dear friend, who patiently and repeatedly must explain why the Court of Appeal is allowed to disagree with me. I still don't get it because I'm always right. More times than I can count, he has made sure that I didn't throw myself off some metaphoric ledge (because I can be somewhat passionate as some of you may know)-he has been my sober second thought too many times to count.

To the wonderful team of women that I am privileged to work with-First, Chris Hennings, my long time assistant. The women lawyers in my

office-warriors all- particularly Danielle Robitaille who is well on the way to being a force to be reckoned with. To the incredibly talented men of our office -my partner, Scott Hutchison and Matthew Gourlay-who have learned that to survive, you must be equally conversant in search warrants, the latest case, the most recent injustice and my most recent shoe purchase. There are no others in this profession that I would rather go into battle with than all of you.

To my not so baby bro, Peter, a partner at Cassels, thank you for hearing me out and making me laugh and for knowing when I am acting out my own play, how to bring me back to earth and say “and scene”.

And finally to my parents and in particular my mom who expected me to achieve, never once said soften up, never once burdened me with the need to do it all, and who daily, daily told me - you are no less than any man.

Thank you – this particular award means more to me than you can know.