

For The Love Of Law

By: Jack Coraggio
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Barrie Goldstein loves her two Sealyham terriers, Domino and Fitzgerald. She loves the three acres of land she owns in Roxbury, where she has lived full time since 2006. And she loves her husband, Justin "Jud" Ebersman, who works in commercial real estate in New York City.

But ask her what she is truly passionate about, and the answer that is sure to come back, perhaps to the dismay of her husband, is the law.

Not just the law, but being a lawyer, her profession since 1975. She loves talking about what it means to be an attorney in this country. She enjoys the opportunities it has presented her, and what she has learned from it. She revels in discussing past trials, of which there were some big ones.

"From the time I was in eighth grade, I really had a passion for the Constitution," said Ms. Goldstein, referring to her childhood in rural Pennsylvania. "And you know I truly love the law-there are so many different threads, and I love pulling the threads apart. It's like a puzzle."

Early this year, Ms. Goldstein opened her own practice, Barrie L. Goldstein, LLC, in Washington Depot. Considering that her career has always been based in the big city (she started in Washington, D.C., before moving to New York City,) a small-town practice is a stark change of pace for her. Considering, however, how triumphant, though challenging, a career she has already had, filled with uphill battles and convoluted trials, she is confident this will be yet another successful endeavor. Take a look at her early days in law. After earning her jurist doctorate with honors from George Washington University (she first graduated Phi Beta Kappa from Syracuse University,) she spent five years in the civil division of the United States Department of Justice.

Ms. Goldstein worked at the Department of Justice on complex regulatory issues affecting housing, renegotiation of government contracts, civil rights and two-tier price controls on domestic and imported oil.

And defending the government during the energy crisis was no small feat for a rookie attorney, especially as big oil challenged the Emergency Petroleum Allocation Act of 1973 and President Gerald Ford's imposition of a \$3 licensing fee per barrel on imported oil. According to Ms. Goldstein, the act was the government's attempt to promote energy conservation.

This particular case seems to stick out in Ms. Goldstein's mind for several reasons. For one, it was her first case out of college. Not only did she help win it, but, she recalled, she "received a lot of recognition in that case." Also, in the middle of the proceedings, she found herself in a heated argument with a well-established judicial figure.

"I was a kid at the time, just the low man on the totem pole, when I was handed a memo on this particular issue," said Ms. Goldstein. "Before I knew it, I was in the office of the attorney general, being asked to recite the position of the civil division." She continued, "I was bombarded by a number of questions from Nino Scalia, who was the assistant attorney general for the office of legal counsel."

Ms. Goldstein may recall him as Nino Scalia, but most of America knows him as Antonin Scalia, a justice on the U.S. Supreme Court.

"I was so young, I didn't know to be scared," she said of her encounter with one of the future faces of American justice.

She moved on to commercial litigation cases in the private sector with a New York City law firm before joining the office of the New York attorney general as special litigation counsel, where she served for 13 years. There, she handled various matters that included the regulation of prescription drug prices under Medicaid, civil rights, bankruptcy and intergovernmental disputes.

Describing her numerous courtroom experiences over the years is a pleasure for her. She's learned a great deal about matters that have little to do with the law but were tied together in her cases.

"The interesting thing about being a litigator is every case is new," Ms. Goldstein stated.

After the Vietnam War, she litigated a renegotiation act that would allow the government to take back excessive profits from war contractors. Her research in this case brought her to a weapons machine shop in California where a private company made rotor balls for the "M505A3 fuses" (Ms. Goldstein named this alphanumeric component with the reflexive memory of a mathematician reciting pi to the sixth digit,) which were made for Gatling guns attached to helicopters.

Or there was the time, while representing New York, she found herself in the boiler room of a naval ship trying to determine exactly how a particular pipe fell onto a seaman's finger. In this case, a merchant marine was suing the state over negligence.

"Every case is unique," said Ms. Goldstein.

She said that even as recently as the 1970s, women were a rare sight in the courtroom. In fact, while working against the oil companies, she was one of fewer than 10 female attorneys on a team of about 200 lawyers.

She recalled how college professors would force the few females in class to discuss any rape cases "to embarrass us," and remembered one judge who told her it was "so nice to have a pretty young woman" argue in front of him.

Sexism aside, Ms. Goldstein pushed forward with her career.

She re-entered a private practice in 1995, where she handled a \$20 million lawsuit involving control of a Norwalk office building. The matter was first arbitrated, then litigated in New York state court and finally was resolved before the federal district and bankruptcy court in Connecticut.

"I learned something about Connecticut from that experience," said Ms. Goldstein. "I got to know a lot of practitioners and it was a really good introduction into Connecticut practice."

She wasn't completely unfamiliar with the Constitution State. She and her husband had been weekenders in Roxbury since 1988. Ms. Goldstein enjoys this area because of its rural roads and beautiful scenery, which reminds her so much of her childhood home in Pennsylvania.

Now her business is starting to pick up. She already has a client, and while her experience in the courtroom bodes well for that person, Ms. Goldstein recognizes that being a successful businesswoman is another matter.

"I now have to be a businessperson. I know how to pay bills, but this is a business that needs to be run," said Ms. Goldstein. "I understand that being on my own is very different from my past history, but I feel that when one door closes, another one opens. And I really feel this is the opening of a new door."

On Titus Road in Washington Depot, her door is always open.