

With 70 Years In Law and Counting, This Trailblazer Has No Plans to Slow Down

Pat Hatry is looking back at her seven-decade career in Davis & Gilbert's advertising, intellectual property and litigation practices—and the ways things have changed for women lawyers in that time.

BY CHRISTINE SCHIFFNER

Patricia Hatry started her legal career 70 years ago making \$35 a week back in 1952. While the pay may have changed since then, her drive hasn't. Hatry has no plans of retiring anytime soon.

The definition of a law firm lifer, Hatry still works for Davis & Gilbert in New York, the firm that hired her straight out of Boston University and Columbia University law schools. Today, she



(l-r) Josh Levine, Ted Kaufman, Ross Gilbert, Sol Friedman, Phil Schwartz, Phil Reiss, Pat Hatry, and Len Orkin, in 1977.

Courtesy photo

mainly focuses on pro bono legal work for the Humane Society of New York and Volunteer Lawyers for the Arts after a career as a partner in Davis & Gilbert's advertising, intellectual property and litigation practices.

“Pat was doing what she does best: redefining leadership before it became fashionable and maybe even a societal imperative,” co-chair of the firm's litigation and dispute resolution group Michael Lasky said. He describes her as refreshing, creative and iconoclastic. He also still remembers being interviewed by her. “I was pre-warned that she was tough. Associates either got along with her or didn't—and those that didn't did not stay very long.”

Hatry was the first one in her family to go to college, much less study law, at a time when many parents thought of their daughters as “just going to get married and have children.” She entered the legal profession when it was “mostly a male society.”

“They didn't quite know how to deal with a woman,” Hatry said with a smile on her face. Being a woman lawyer at that time never felt like a disadvantage, she said.

After initially applying at a white shoe law firm in Manhattan and being interviewed by a “snuff-



Patricia Hatry, with Davis&Gilbert.

Photo: Christine Schiffner/ALM

sniffing partner," she quickly realized that she "did not like that hugeness." So she chose Davis & Gilbert instead, which at the time was a seven-lawyer boutique.

"When I started in this wonderful little firm, I shared an office with a cigar-smoking lawyer who thought he had to shout to make himself heard every time he called California." The firm frequently worked on advertisement and TV legal issues—"it was still black and white," just gradually becoming color.

She quickly climbed the ranks at the firm. "She was the first woman partner at Davis & Gilbert, [at a time] when women weren't made partners at firms in New York City," Lasky said. Soon after, she joined the firm's management committee "30 years before that became something that others did."

And she was also a trailblazer when it came to juggling a busy legal career and family life. She worked through the ninth month of pregnancy with her first daughter and returned back to work only a week after the baby was born. "Today it seems a bit easier, with all the time off."

Among her more memorable cases was a litigation over the recovery of fees in a claim against Avis Flowers, a startup owned

by rental car magnate Warren Avis that had gone belly up. She faced the notorious attorney Roy Cohn who had made headlines as chief counsel to Sen. Joseph McCarthy in the 1950s hearings labeling political opponents as Communists.

"He wanted to come up to the office, and I kept him waiting," Hatry recalls. Later during the meeting Hatry and one of her associates met a suntanned Cohn talking about his recent trip to Acapulco. Then, the conversation quickly took a more tense turn after Cohn asked Hatry to drop the claims. "Why would I do that," Hatry recalls asking him. "Because the judge is a friend of mine," Cohn replied.

When Hatry made it clear that the discussion was over, Cohn addressed her young associate "Maybe I should talk to you?" Hatry took the case to court and won. Cohn's claim "was fiction, as they often are."

It was a time when litigation often "wasn't a group thing" but rather handled alone. "I had a file, went to court and tried the case—it was great." It was also a time when advertising law was a huge driver in New York and some witnesses were better not called on the stand in the afternoon because "they had two-

Martini lunches." She remembers being called a "charming adversary" by opposing counsel more than once in a jury trial.

Hatry, who has been admired by her colleagues for her legal writing, also represented corporations such as Slim-Fast and Weight Watchers. "She never chose to write legal briefs in the typical, fashion—which is kind of boring," the firm's of-counsel Bruce Ginsberg said. She would get the clerks' and judges' attention by "interjecting wonderful ideas and words that you would not have expected to see in this particular context."

She also served as a referee for the Departmental Disciplinary Committee for the New York State Supreme Court Appellate Division, which presided over judicial ethics, including disbarment.

Her brilliant legal career has not kept Hatry from her other passion of being active in the outdoors. "I love tennis, I kayaked, golfed, skied." She raised two daughters and today splits her time between a place on Manhattan's Upper West Side and Vermont.

"Live life to the fullest," she recommends. "We have one life on this planet and we should use it to the full. It offers a plethora of everything and we should all be as happy as queens."