In Honor of International Women's Day and Women's History Month, RIW's Women Attorneys Reflect on their History

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Kelly Caralis
Co-Chair, **Hospitality Practice Group**; Member, **Commercial Real Estate**, **Corporate & Business**, **Emerging Companies**, **Employment Law**, **Franchise Law**, **Mergers & Acquisitions**

The restaurant industry has been such an important part of my professional and personal journey, and remains a big part of my life today. As the daughter of a Greek immigrant, I naturally grew up in and around the restaurant industry and some of my most cherished childhood memories stem from the times I spent going to work with my father at the various restaurants he worked at over the years, doing whatever I could to help and learn. I can still recall the sense of pride I felt at 14, after getting my work papers, when I got my first "real" job at the local diner in my hometown. In my teenage to young adult years, I worked at a restaurant on the Fish Pier (now the Seaport District) where I met my husband, worked my way through college, and learned how to truly connect with people while also understanding what it took to run a fast-paced successful restaurant. These tools would come in handy in later years when my husband and I decided to open our own fast casual restaurant, a place rooted in family, traditional Italian meals (my husband is Italian), and a place for people to connect. My experience in the restaurant industry even helped me land my first job as a lawyer because the hiring partners at the firm I was interviewing with were so impressed that I worked my way through college while working full-time in a restaurant! It only seemed fitting to me to center my law practice on hospitality as it has made such an impact in my life and shaped me as a person. I am very proud to be a woman in hospitality and enjoy working with and advising different restaurateurs and chefs. I hope that my institutional knowledge of the industry gives them a level of comfort that I understand their business and legal needs on a deeper level.

Bethany Grazio
Member, **Cannabis**, **Corporate & Business**, **Emerging Companies**, **Employment Law**, **Hospitality Practice Group**, **Mergers & Acquisitions**, **Private Placements**

As lawyers, often our most valuable tool is our voice. I spend my days advocating for my clients, whether it is negotiating purchase agreements and other contracts or turning my client's needs and concerns into agreements. In 2017, I adopted my daughter from foster care. The process started long before then and this was the culmination of me advocating for myself and for my soon to be daughter. It wasn't until this point that I realized just how strong my voice was. I continue to use my voice to mentor other parents who are going through the process, to speak on behalf of and in support of the Massachusetts Adoption Resource Exchange and to speak about and promote adoption in general. It has also made me a better lawyer because I understand how important it is for your voice to be heard and reflected in your transaction. I advocate for all my clients with the same commitment and tenacity as I would advocate for my daughter – with me, you get a hands on, personal approach.

Sarah Melia
Member, **Trusts & Estates**

I come from a large, close family and I have three kids of my own and family means everything to me. From early on in my estate planning career, some of my first clients were family members and friends who are like family: people close to me who trusted me as a new lawyer to create a plan for them and their children or grandchildren. I worked hard to make sure they were taken care of, like family does. My client network grew from those early clients, to include their family members and friends and so on, and twenty years later, now most of my clients are not people I've met before, but my approach hasn't changed. I enter each client relationship with the goal to treat each client like I would my own family, because they are all trusting me with their legacy and their goals to provide for the people closest to them even after they are not here. Estate planning is personal, and all of my clients mean a great deal to me.

Rachel Wassel
Chair, **Trusts & Estates**

Trust and estate work is highly personal in nature. Attorneys in this field routinely counsel clients faced with loss of loved one or terminal illness. We also ask our clients to make difficult and emotional decisions such as designating guardians or trustees for minor children, planning for a child with special needs or making tough decisions for children struggling with substance abuse. Upon reflection, I think there was a point in my career when the *how we plan* became integrated with the *why we plan.* In other words, I felt there was a shift when the technical aspects of estate planning administration become second nature, giving way to an ability to focus on the unique personal goals of each client. I draw from my own history, be it personal or professional, each and every day. As a parent of a 14 year-old daughter and 11 year-old son, I understand how difficult it can be to select a guardian for minor children. As a cancer survivor and a wife, I can empathize with clients coping with health-related issues, as well as those caring for them. I am particularly grateful for my prior experience working at Perkins School for the Blind and the many opportunities I have helping families plan for children or family members with special needs.

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