

Guardians of Civil Justice Spotlight – Mitra Shahri

Anyone who has met new stalwart Guardians member Mitra Shahri is not likely to soon forget her. Her presence is big, her energy and passion for her profession is quickly recognizable. At the November Women's Caucus luncheon, upon meeting the eight plus current and former state women legislators and one statewide elected official who have benefited from OTLA PAC contributions, Mitra leapt from her chair and gave to the Guardians of Civil Justice program. And she gave big – \$6,000 annually to be exact.

An OTLA member since she landed in Portland in 2002, Mitra is now founding partner of the employment law firm of Mitra Law Group. She began her legal practice in 1993 in Los Angeles at a prestigious defense firm, where she received invaluable training and experience in litigation and handling of various cases including sexual harassment issues. In 1995, she founded a boutique law firm in Century City where she exclusively represented employees in employment related matters with special emphasis on whistleblower and sexual harassment claims against Hollywood celebrities, major motion pictures and movie studios. Mitra is licensed to practice in all state and federal courts in Oregon and California, as well as the federal courts in the Ninth Circuit. She has litigated hundreds of employment cases in the two states.

In 1998, the Los Angeles Legal Journal praised her unique and innovative litigation style and branded her a “literary lion.” Mitra has developed a reputation for making causes out of cases and challenging the existing and archaic legal norms. She is well known for being a tough and passionate advocate for her clients.

Mitra received her JD in 1993 from the University of Utah in Salt Lake City, where she graduated with top honors and was designated a *William H. Leary Scholar*. She spent her undergraduate years at Wichita State University in Kansas, where she played point guard for the women's varsity basketball team.



Mitra Shahri

While law is her passion, Mitra's favorite hobby is performing stand-up comedy. She has participated in several charity fundraisers, including the 2004 LAF-OFF Comedy competition where she helped raise money for Campaign for Equal Justice. She has performed at several comedy clubs, including Harvey's in Portland.

The best thing about my job is:

Playing Robin Hood. Seeing hard working and honest employees get-

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is a fierce force...**

ting abused and harassed at work really pisses me off. Punishing employers for their misdeeds is empowering and brings joy to my life.

The hardest thing about my job is:

To settle a case for a lot less than what I think its worth because the client can't afford the risk.

Why I give to The Guardians of Civil Justice program:

I feel blessed to be in a position to pick and choose cases, to have an amazing staff that helps me kick butt, but most of all, I feel blessed to have an organization that fights for our right to have better laws and overall better lives.

What I'd like colleagues to know about OTLA is:

That OTLA is truly the wind beneath my wings. In 2002, when I first moved to Oregon, OTLA was like a spring board and a safety net that allowed me to spread my wings without fear and to soar high in a new territory where I didn't know a soul. It gave me the confidence to care more than others think is wise, to risk more than others think is safe and to dream more than others think is possible. The collective wisdom, experience and assistance of OTLA members on the listserv is a fierce force and unmatched by even the largest and most powerful defense firms.

My work life has changed in the last year because:

For the first time in my legal career, I advertised in the yellow pages and online. I had never advertised before because at my law school, I was voted “Most likely to have a glossy ad on the back cover of the phone book.” Having graduated at the top of my class, I was so offended. The first ten years of my practice, I paid a nominal fee to have my business phone numbers unlisted. I never handed out business cards to non-lawyers and only promoted myself among lawyers. Having gotten engaged last year and realizing, for the first time, that there is more to life than just working forever, I began to fully appreciate the true limitations that my arrogance had placed on my ability to have a secure and carefree financial future.

The opportunities I see from that change are:

Fast growth in a down economy. I now can pick and choose cases I want to spend lots of emotional and financial resources on to vindicate my client and change the offenders' future behavior. My true passion lies in eradicating sexual harassment and corruption in the work place, both of which can be financially and emotionally draining and/or rewarding.

Growing up I thought I would become:

Anything but a housewife. Growing

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up in Iran my mom used to tell me that whatever I spent my childhood doing would end up determining my future. She used to tell me if I spend time learning how to cook and clean, I'd grow up to be a great housewife and if I spend time learning how to sew, I'd end up being a great seamstress. I thought her theory was completely sexist and flawed. So, while pretending to watch her cook and sew, I found myself constantly arguing with her, using any example I could find to contradict her theory and to prove her wrong. So, I grew up to be a lawyer and not a housewife!

Why I did/didn't (see above):

Because being a lawyer is the best, most rewarding and most fun profession ever!!!

There's more to life than my job. My favorite activities are:

Hanging out with my sweet fiancé, Christopher all weekend watching movies, laughing, playing pool, ping pong, tennis, foosball, air hockey ... just enjoying life and finally living in the moment.

I knew I was grown up when:

I had to fight back as a young sole practitioner in L.A. against three big defense firms who took delight in tag teaming me at the same time with different discovery motions in a sexual harassment case.

I've always wanted to:

Be a motivational speaker with a funny, but edgy, tough-love advice column: Stop whining, start taking responsibility and take the first step to change what you don't like in your life.

The classes in law school I dreaded were:

Civil procedure! What in the world was "International Shoe" all about? Minimum contact is something that should only be taught in sexual harassment classes!

My first job was:

A cashier at McDonald's in Wichita, Kansas. It was also the first place I learned that when your manager grabs your behind, you don't say "no" if you want to keep your job. Lucky for me, there were more fast food restaurants around than there were grabby managers. It was simply a numbers



Mult. Co. Circuit Court Judge Judy Matarazzo and Mitra Shahri at the spring Women's Caucus lunch.

game and I won at the end, no pun intended!

I'm proudest of:

My decision to go to law school after 5 years of working in a hospital as a medical technologist.

I wish:

The defense would also be required to waive their fees if they lose a trial. I bet the defense would recommend settlement every time.

I can't live without:

Internet or emails. Long live Google!

Most influential person in my life:

Sun Tzu.

Advice you would give to a new lawyer:

First and foremost, a restful night in a hovel beats a restless night in a mansion. Remember that the choices you make each day will determine the lawyer you will become in 10 years. There are no short cuts in doing the right thing but there are lots of creative, efficient and even undiscovered fun ways of doing everything right. Second, use others' advice or even precedent as a tool and not as a rule or a limitation for what you can or cannot do. Third, never ever accept anyone's legal response without confirming it by reading the statute or case law yourself, because even the brightest can make a mistake. Bringing me to my final advice: swallow your ego as it will weigh you down and prevent you from timely getting rid of a case or a client when you really should.

My motto:

Never ask "why," instead always ask "why not!"

My epitaph:

"I did it my way."

Charlie Williamson announces his friendly separation from Kell Alterman and Runstein LLP after more than 25 years of practice with the firm. He wishes his good friends and fine lawyers at the Kell office the best of success.

He also announces the commencement of:

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