

PEOPLE

Head of the class

COLIN POPE

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Jerry Clements almost hit her head on the proverbial glass ceiling.

In the early 1970s, the prevailing thought was that women just weren't cut out for corporate jobs.

So when she graduated from her Fort Worth high school in 1972, she embarked on an education aimed at educating others. Teaching was a logical and noble career for a woman, she thought, so after graduating from Texas Christian University, she embarked on a teaching career.

As a new teacher, she took a job arguably more challenging than what any man faced. She taught special education at Nichols Junior High School in Arlington.

Some of her students were deaf — and Clements didn't know sign language. Others struggled with dyslexia, and some were emotionally disturbed. Regardless of their condition, they were lumped together in one class — in an underfunded and overlooked program — and Clements made the best of it.

So how did she come to be a lawyer?

"I just sort of lucked into this, if you want to know the truth," she says. "After four years of teaching I decided that I wanted to do something different and go to grad school. I had a family friend who went to law school and I thought, that sounds like fun."

When her grandmother was told about Clements' plan to go to law school, she expressed excitement about her granddaughter possibly becoming a legal secretary. Clements quickly made it clear that her ambitions were on a grander level.

Even when she entered law school, Clements wasn't sure exactly what kind of law she wanted to practice.

"Baylor has a very strong trial program," she says. "If you went to Baylor, for the most part, you were going to be a trial lawyer, and that's what happened in my case."

Standing up in front of a crowd and being liked was never an issue for Clements, so the work of a trial lawyer suited her perfectly.

Her career as a litigator was influenced greatly by another ambitious female, Harriet Miers. Miers, a former co-managing partner of the firm Clements now leads, made certain other women and minorities had the same opportunities as the men, Clements says.

Starting in about 1991, Miers made sure Clements — one of her all-star trial lawyers — always had a seat on some sort of management committee.

"Harriet always treated people fairly, and I learned that the only way to be successful is if the partners trust you," she says.

The partners at Locke Liddell & Sapp LLP gave Clements the ultimate vote of confidence a couple of months ago when they elected her firmwide managing partner, which puts her in charge of more than 380 lawyers across the state.

Seated in her corner office on Congress Avenue, Clements says one of her top goals is attracting quality talent, and making sure even the youngest of them is getting face time with clients and developing the confidence, experience and leadership skills to carry the torch after her.

Jerry Clements

Managing partner

Locke Liddell
& Sapp LLP

THE Q&A

Q: How long have you been playing golf?

A: "I'm obsessed with golf. I love it. I started playing 15 years ago for business development purposes. I learned early on that a lot of business is done on a golf course, and it's been a great business development tool. When you play a round of golf with someone, you really get to know them."

As she glances over to a couple of pewter golf trophies near her desk, she adds: "My vacations are often centered around golf."

Q: Speaking of vacations, I hear you have some pretty fun ones with some other high-powered female lawyers.

A: "Yes, every year a group of my girlfriends travel to Napa Valley. We rent a limo and go from vineyard to vineyard — it's a lot of fun."

Q: What is this I hear about twirling a baton on the "Today Show"?

A: "When I was young, I twirled a baton in school. On my 50th birthday, we celebrated in New York City and they got me up really early one morning, surprised me with a baton — a really good one — and went to stand outside the 'Today Show.' One of the producers noticed this loud group of women, asked us what our shtick was, and before I knew it I was twirling my baton on national television, in 12 degrees in February in New York City."

WHAT OTHERS SAY



Jerry is a go-to lawyer in the truest sense. In a span of time in which women were only making first strides in the legal profession, Jerry not only moved out of the pack, but carved a remarkably high profile as one of the best of the best. Jerry is bright, savvy, engaging and has a work ethic that doesn't end.

Brad Toben
Dean
Baylor Law School

After being her partner for seven years, I can tell you she is a great litigator because she is extraordinarily talented and intelligent, she has a great speaking voice and delivery, and she is a clear and organized thinker. She's a natural leader, so she was a natural choice to lead the whole firm with her proven leadership skills.

Bruce LaBoon
Partner
Locke Liddell & Sapp LLP



IN DETAIL

HOMETOWN: Fort Worth**FAMILY:** Husband, Mark Clements; four children.**EDUCATION:** Bachelor's degree from Texas Christian University; law degree from Baylor University's School of Law.

You wouldn't believe how many calls I got after that from people I knew all across the country."

Q: What is the difference between a good litigator and a great litigator?

A: "It's not something you can learn. You have to have the qualities that allow you to stand in front of a jury and have them like you and trust you. You have to have compassion and believability — they sense if a person is not sincere. It's essential that you're passionate about your cause."

Q: What was your most satisfying case?

A: "I've handled lots of big cases with big names and large issues, but the one that stands out was a pro-bono case when I was a young lawyer. I represented a worker for a defense contractor who went into a 12-step program for alcohol abuse. The government believed that this could subject him to blackmail, so they jerked his security clearance — essentially putting him out of a job. He was an alcoholic for years, but when he was clean and sober, that's when the government decided to take away his clearance."

"He was a high-level engineer and his employer wouldn't cover the legal fees to fight it and he couldn't afford to pay us, but I took his case. The government had all these big experts testifying and I brought in his AA sponsor and some friends and family to talk about what a good worker and person he is."

"We got his security clearance back and he was able to go back to work. That was a client who needed me the most, and he was the most grateful. I realized then that this was the profession for me, and that's why I encourage attorneys here to do pro-bono work that really matters."

Q: Do you still practice law, or do management duties consume your time?

A: "I continue to focus on the needs of some key clients, but I've scaled back. My hope is to always stay somewhat involved in litigation matters."