

Trailblazing Woman in the Law

Sheryl Sanford '01 Founding Partner, Black Marjeh & Sanford LLP

Sheryl Sanford is a founding partner of the 100% women-owned law firm Black Marjeh & Sanford LLP. Positive that she wanted to be a lawyer from a young age, she took her first law school class in high school and never looked back. As an insurance defense attorney, she handles construction-related accidents, represents many non-profits, gyms, churches, schools, and also specializes in retail cases as she also has hands on experience working in the supermarket industry prior to law school. When she isn't in the courtroom, you can find her spending time with her daughter, playing volleyball, or singing karaoke.



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I attended John Jay College of Criminal Justice because I loved criminal law and I was contemplating becoming a police officer in the event I was unable to pursue law school. The NYPD called me in my last year of college, but by that time I had already applied to law schools and taken the LSAT. I chose Pace over two other schools because Pace allowed me to come and sit in one of their classes in which there

was an oral argument. I remember sitting on the edge of my seat rooting for the students and listening to the constructive feedback from the Professor. I loved the people, the campus, and everything I saw and heard about the school.

Which experiences at Pace had the greatest impact on your law school experience?

My most impactful experiences at Pace were the many practical ones, including participating in the externships that Pace had to offer. I took a civil litigation clinic that taught me how to litigate and think like an attorney. I also externed at the Attorney General's office and Bronx County Legal Aid where I was able to "shadow" two fabulous attorneys and mentors who brought me to court and gave me the type of assignments I would be given as a new attorney. The externships at Pace provided valuable hands on experience that I otherwise would not receive in law school.

Who were some of your favorite professors at Pace?

Professor Janet Johnson (Torts) and Professor Michelle Simon (Civil litigation). They are both admirable, successful women, but they taught in a way that was clear and they inspired critical thought as opposed to just memorizing elements and rules.

Do you remember your first day of law school?

Yes, I looked around the room and realized everyone looked just as scared to death as me.

You are a founding partner of Black Marjeh & Sanford LLP—what is your day to day like?

As a partner at Black Marjeh & Sanford LLP, every day is different. One day, I may be taking a deposition or arguing a motion and the next day I am dealing with office-related issues, always mindful of prioritizing our firm culture of putting our employees first.

How has the pandemic shaped the way you practice?

The pandemic reinforced our firm's mentality that our firm is resilient. We invested in technology from the inception of our firm in 2017, which was instrumental in managing through the pandemic. I now just need to keep up with technology, which I must admit scares me. I am trying to be open to learning new things like utilizing technology in litigation.

Which practice areas do you concentrate in and why those areas in particular?

Our firm handles insurance defense, which covers a wide spectrum of practice areas spanning from construction accidents to slips, trips, and falls, which often times raise complex issues. I represent many

non-profits, gyms, churches, schools, and I also handle retail cases. These types of cases interest me because I worked for a supermarket chain for eleven years (from age 16 until I graduated from law school at age 27) and I was trained on how to complete accident reports. As a litigator, I now see why the wording and initial investigation into occurrences is key.

You remain very involved with the Law School—thank you—why is it important to you to remain involved?

I had wonderful mentors through my various externships, internships, and some of the best Professors who provided me with valuable advice. It is important to me to pay it forward and help law students because I was in their shoes not too long ago and it is important to me to do what I can in return.

One way that your firm has consistently supported Haub Law is by hiring many graduates—thank you! What sets Haub Law graduates apart in your experience?

We offer an internship program from which we have hired Haub Law students that have demonstrated that they are not only intelligent, diligent, and hard-working, they also exercise sound judgment, common-sense, independent thinking and, importantly, they fit in with the culture of our firm which focuses on team work.

What does it mean to you to be a "woman in the law"?

Our firm is a 100 percent women-owned firm. I am chair of the Haub "Women in Law" work life balance committee and a member of the Westchester County Women's Bar Association. I have heard stories from women in these groups where they discuss the discrimination they faced years ago and how they bravely paved the way so that women like us can follow in their footsteps. Years ago, they told women that you can have a family or a career, but you can't have both. I am proud to be in the position to say, "Yes, you can."

Do you have any advice for current or future law students?

Yes. Believe in yourself and believe that you can do it all because you can—it just takes hard work and dedication.

What are some of your passions aside from the law?

I am passionate about my family and my daughter who makes me SO proud to be her mom. I also love volleyball and I am passionate about karaoke... although some people do not appreciate it when my cousin and I pull out the karaoke machine and sing. ■