



Monday Monday

Connecting the Dots with Karen
Kaplowitz



Helping you create and reinforce the habits of successful career building, gleaned from my work as a business development strategist, trainer and coach

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Happy 90th Birthday Blanche Bersch!

On the eve of this historic 2024 election, I am delighted to mark the 90th birthday on November 7 of one of the women who helped pave the way for Kamala Harris. Blanche Bersch is still every bit as courageous and committed to gender equality now as she was 50 years ago when she was one of the founders of California Women Lawyers and my law partner along with Bette Bardeen in one of the first women-owned law firms in Los Angeles, Bardeen Bersch & Kaplowitz. When we opened our doors in June 1974, Blanche, at 39 and a six-year veteran of the California Attorney General's office, was our senior partner. As the married mother of three school-age children who had attended night law school so her husband could care for the children in the evening, Blanche also brought maturity and experience to our firm. She told me that if I ever wanted to have a family, I would have to give up being a cliffhanger, finishing briefs at the last minute. She explained that she got her briefs done two days in advance so if a child got sick, she would not have a crisis.

I met Blanche through the Women Lawyers Association of Los Angeles. I knew she was a kindred spirit when she asked me to join her at a stag dinner honoring her then boss, California Attorney General Evelle Younger. Blanche had learned that the Attorney General was being honored by an organization at the all-male Los Angeles Police Academy in Elysian Park [near Dodger Stadium]. Notices inviting lawyers to sign up for the event were posted only in the men's rooms at the AG's office. Blanche thought it was unseemly that a public official would be honored in his official capacity at an event which excluded women. To his credit, when Blanche informed the Attorney General that she planned to attend with two women friends, he did not stand in the way. We spent a memorable evening, three women among hundreds of men, escorted everywhere, including a men's room that was periodically cleared out since there were no women's facilities at the Police Academy. We were seated prominently at the dinner and were relieved that there were no raunchy jokes that night on the program.

Blanche was as brilliant as she was bold and highly respected in the legal community. The AG's offices were in the same building as the California Court of Appeal and Blanche had done extensive appellate work when she was a Deputy Attorney General. That did not stop her when our firm was asked to represent a highly qualified woman candidate to be Deputy Clerk of the Court of Appeal. Our client was told bluntly by the Court's Administrator that he would not even consider a woman for the job. While the sex discrimination suit was pending, Blanche was in the lobby of the Court one day when she saw Justice Otto Kaus for whom she had a high regard. Justice Kaus, who later became a Justice of the California Supreme Court, greeted Blanche with a friendly hug. Then Justice Kaus stepped back and said "You are suing us. I guess I can't hug you anymore." Fortunately, the Court of Appeal settled our client's case quickly and they could resume their friendship.

Kamala Harris's campaign slogan is "We Will Never Go Back". I am hoping Kamala Harris wins this election but if we must fight the same battles again that we have fought for the last 50 years, I know that we will have role models like my dear friend and partner Blanche Bersch to rely on.

Happy 90th Birthday Blanche!