
A Tribute to Selma

BY HON. KATHRYN MICKLE WERDEGAR,
ASSOCIATE JUSTICE OF THE CALIFORNIA SUPREME COURT

Selma Moidel Smith was elected to the Board of the CSCHS in September 2001, and from that time forward has been a devoted and energetic member of our Board. As chair of the Publications Committee, she has served as editor of both the Society's Journal, *California Legal History*, and its semi-annual Newsletter, elevating the quality of both publications to the highest level. She inaugurated the Society's successful writing competition, inviting students in law schools and graduate programs to submit essays relevant to California's legal issues and history. Since Selma joined the Board, the success of each of the Society's educational programs has been in large measure due to her creative spirit, her generous gift of time, her attention to detail and her willingness to assume any task, large or small. Selma, in short, has over the years been at the heart of the Society's many diverse endeavors.

But there is more. The California Supreme Court Historical Society is not the only organization fortunate enough to have engaged Selma's attention and talent. This past April (coinciding with her 93rd birthday), the ABA Senior Lawyers Division accorded Selma the extraordinary honor of dedicating the Spring 2012 issue of the Division's *Experience* magazine to her in gratitude for the many articles she has written for the Division's publications, her innovations for the benefit of the magazine, and her outstanding service as chair of the magazine's Editorial Board, the first woman to hold that office. As stated in the Prologue to the issue, "What a gift we got in Selma!"

This latest accolade is just one in a treasure chest of honors that have been showered on Selma over the span of her career, and not all related to the law. Selma is a gifted musician: she is a pianist, violinist, and Spanish guitarist, as well as a composer of more than 100 piano and orchestral pieces, many with a Latin flavor. Her music has been performed at the National Museum of Women in the Arts in Washington, D.C. and, most recently, at Walt Disney Concert Hall in Los Angeles by the Los Angeles Lawyers Philharmonic, resulting in a standing ovation. She is listed in the *International Encyclopedia of Women Composers*. Fluent in Spanish, she was the first bilingual docent of the Los Angeles Philharmonic, giving in-school music



Selma Moidel Smith, at the meeting of the National Association of Women Lawyers, Miami, Florida, February 2007.

presentations in Spanish-speaking communities and appearing, at the piano, on educational television. Selma expresses her love of music through dance as well, and is gifted with a fine soprano voice. During her years of law practice, she also continued her music studies and was selected by audition to sing in the UCLA University Chorus and, later, to participate in a month-long international piano master class at the Royal College of Music in London. Her gifts in the arts also include poetry, as evidenced by the poem, "Dawn and Sunset" (see page 5), written and published when Selma was 16 years old.

Selma has always been supportive of issues important to women, in both the law and other significant arenas, and has held positions of leadership in numerous organizations directed to women's professional advancement; indeed, every

organization Selma joins ultimately places her at its helm or in a position of leadership. In 1953 she was invited by the college president to become a charter member of the National Board of the Woman's Medical College of Pennsylvania (later the Medical College of Pennsylvania), which was founded in 1850 to enable women to train as physicians, and she later served as president of the Board. In 1965 she was invited to attend the Washington World Conference on World Peace through Law as the official representative of numerous women's legal organizations, as well as to serve as host for Latin American judges and lawyers. She has been president of the Los Angeles Business Women's Council and has held many posts in the International Federation of Women Lawyers, the National Association of Women Lawyers (which has honored her with its Lifetime of Service Award and the creation of the annual Selma Moidel Smith Law Student Writing Competition), and the Women Lawyers Association of Los Angeles, which in 1998 awarded her its first and only honorary life membership in recognition of her then-55 years of commitment and service including two terms as president. Throughout her career and to this day, Selma has been an inspiration to all who know her.

Although we are neither the first nor the only organization to appreciate the "gift of Selma," appreciate her we do. Members of the Board had occasion to express their admiration, affection and appreciation of Selma

last fall, when, after three years, she announced (in the email reproduced below) that while she would continue as editor of our Journal, she would hand on her editorship of the Newsletter. At that time members of the Board wrote to Selma, expressing heartfelt thanks for her work with the Newsletter and the Society. (See below and pages 4–5 for some of those messages of appreciation.)

Thank you, Selma, for all you have done and continue to do for the Society. We honor you for your leadership, dedication and generosity in the sharing of your talents, all to the benefit of the Society and the wider community of judges, lawyers, and scholars that it serves. We are privileged to have you in our midst.

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Dear Board Members,

August 2011

I would like to share with you some news about our Newsletter. You may recall that in the summer of 2008, shortly after I was appointed publications chair, it was necessary to replace our staff Newsletter editor, and so I agreed to “fill in” for one issue. That is now seven Newsletters ago. As you also know, I was appointed editor of our annual Journal that same fall, and have been doing both simultaneously since then.

Earlier this year, I decided it was time to lighten my workload, and spoke with Ray McDevitt and Jake Dear about the possibility of their taking on the Newsletter together, so that I could recommend their appointment to Dan, and thereafter focus my efforts on the Journal. I’m pleased to say that Dan has now appointed Ray as Newsletter editor, and Jake will serve as associate editor. Thank you both, Ray and Jake, and I’m wishing you the great pleasure that I have had in editing our Society’s Newsletter.

With best regards to you all,
Selma

EMAIL RESPONSES FROM BOARD MEMBERS

Dear Selma, thank you for your extreme dedication and hard work on behalf of the Society, especially editing both the Newsletter and Journal in recent years. Not only the Society’s board, but the entire legal historical community is very much indebted to you, a debt that can never be fully repaid except by the great affection we all have for you. You are a wonderful treasure! You certainly deserve to lighten your load.

Warmest Personal Regards,
— Jim [Shekoyan, Past President of the Society]



Celebrating the 20th Anniversary of the National Board of the Medical College of Pennsylvania — in the receiving line with (fellow board member) Princess Grace of Monaco, Sheraton-Carlton Hotel, Washington, D.C., December 1973.

I agree with Jim — Selma, you have set new high standards for both the Journal and Newsletter, and for that we all owe you a sustained round of applause and thanks.

— Jake [Dear]

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Mostly, THANK YOU, SELMA!

— Fritz [Frederick Ohlrich]

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Let me add my voice to the chorus of thanks and deep appreciation. Selma — you have done a magnificent job with the Newsletter. The countless hours you have spent over the years working on the Newsletter have greatly benefited the Society and all of us who care about the organization, its mission and its future. On behalf of all of us — please accept our profound and abiding thank you!!

— Dan [Grunfeld, President of the Society]

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At the U.S. Supreme Court — with Chief Justice Earl Warren during the Washington World Conference on World Peace through Law, September 1965.

Selma — you have to receive the “fill-in” editor of the decade award for all you have done in producing an outstanding Newsletter. It and the Journal are publications I look forward to receiving and truly enjoy reading. I hope you will continue with the Journal for many years. All best wishes,

— John [Burns]

Selma, I just returned from my vacation and read your email. I want to express my personal thanks for all that you have done for the Society, especially how you volunteered to “fill in” as editor and championed the writing competition for law students. Since you are such a wonderful, articulate writer and an excellent editor yourself, you realize how important it is for students to be encouraged to pursue legal scholarship and to be recognized for doing so. But this is but one of many benefits we have received by having you on the Board. We are so much better as an organization because you have stepped up and shown us the way. Thank you, Selma,

— Karen Smith [Professor]

Dear Selma, I’ve been happy to read all the accolades sent your way in response to your announcement that you are passing the torch for editing the Newsletter to Ray and Jake. I concur in them all, and I want to add that your dedication to the task and your skill, creativity, and good nature in tending to all the myriad aspects of producing the Newsletter — both onerous and pleasurable — have been beyond compare. Your contribution has been extraordinary and, of course, continues to be so with the Journal. We are deeply indebted to you. With warmest good wishes,

— Kathryn Werdegar
[Associate Justice, California Supreme Court]

Dear Selma, Justice Werdegar and other Board colleagues have said it beautifully, and I concur on every point! Having had my own immersion in the Newsletter editorship while managing in addition only a fraction of the range of duties you take on for us, I am especially appreciative for the wonderful way in which you have carried on the Newsletter, your other Board duties, and — not least — editorship of the now-enlarged and impressively upgraded Journal! Thank you so much for your dedication, your wisdom, and your energy, given so generously to the Society as it has expanded its agenda and its outreach.

— Harry [Professor Harry Scheiber]

Selma, the Newsletter has certainly improved tremendously, and I join in the expression of gratitude.

— Mitch [Keiter]

Selma, I too want to express my personal gratitude to you for your diligence and dedication in connection with the Newsletter, the Journal and all other aspects of the work of the CSCHS. All the very best,

— Eric [Joss, Vice President of the Society]

Selma — I want to add my voice to the crescendo of congratulations and thanks. You are an amazing renaissance woman, and the Society has been incredibly fortunate to have had the benefit of your extraordinary talents. Everything you have touched has been spectacular!

— Kent [Richland, Past President of the Society]

I join in the thanks. Selma, you have done a fantastic job!

— Tom McDermott

Hi Selma, let me add my voice to the chorus: we are all so grateful to you for the splendid work you've done on behalf of the CSCHS! Best,

— Molly
[Professor Molly Selvin, Secretary of the Society]

It was great to see so many emails expressing appreciation for your fine work with the Society. All of the praise expressed, and more, is justly deserved. You do such a wonderful job on all of the projects you undertake.

— Joyce [Cook]

Good afternoon, Selma. It has been very gratifying to see the spontaneous outpouring of admiration and affection for you, and I do wish to associate myself with that expression of gratitude for all that you have done, and continue to do, for the Society. All the best,

— Ray [McDevitt, Past President of the Society]

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DAWN AND SUNSET

Dawn — and the world awakens
From its peaceful slumber;

The pinkish hues of the morning sun
Are tinting the hills and valleys.
What can this new day bring?
Perhaps a smile, perhaps a tear.
But always inspiration!

As it turns a page in the Book of Life
It turns our hearts once more and again
Toward the God of Eternal Hope —
Dawn!

Sunset — the darkness has triumphed
And the world returns to its slumber:
But over the distant hills and valleys
Spreads a blanket of flame and gold —
The last farewell of a dying day.
Reluctantly it falls from view
With one brief pause as if to say,
“A day has passed — a day well done;
What matters if there was a tear?
There's always inspiration!”

As it turns a page in the Book of Life
So turn our hearts once more and again
Toward the God of Peace, and Rest, and Memory —
Sunset!

— S.M.S. (at age 16)



On the premiere of her orchestral suite, “Espressivo” — feature story and photo (at her piano), Los Angeles Times, October 1986.

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Presenting an award to Los Angeles Philharmonic Conductor Zubin Mehta in his office at the Los Angeles Music Center, November 1975.
