

ORAL HISTORY  
RUTH CHURCH GUPTA  
(1917-2009)



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*Oral History of*

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### EDITOR'S NOTE

The oral history of Ruth Church Gupta is one of four oral histories conducted by the former California State Bar Committee on History of Law in California in 1987. These were the final oral histories conducted by the committee, and they are published for the first time in the present volume of *California Legal History* (vol. 6, 2011). The interview was conducted on September 28, 1987, by committee member Rosalyn Zakheim on behalf of the committee (which she chaired in 1988-89) and the Women Lawyers Association of Los Angeles (of which she was president in 1983-84).

The oral history has been reedited for publication. The spelling of names has been corrected wherever possible, and explanatory notations in [square brackets] have been added by the editor. The sound recording and original transcription are available at The Bancroft Library, UC Berkeley. The oral history is published by permission of the State Bar of California.

Gupta served as president of the Queen's Bench Bar Association in San Francisco in 1953, and Ruth Rymer, who served as president in 1976, agreed to prepare the brief reminiscence of Gupta that appears below.

— SELMA MOIDEL SMITH

## RUTH CHURCH GUPTA

RUTH RYMER\*

I was admitted to practice in 1971. Everything in law school had been part of a male-oriented paradigm and at first glance the Bar appeared similar. Suddenly, when I joined Queens Bench, I was surrounded by sympathetic sisters-in-the-law and aunts-in-the-law. One of my new aunts was Ruth Church Gupta who had been admitted the year before I graduated from high school. We developed an immediate rapport when we discovered that we had both attended Mills College.

Ruth and her husband, Kamini, had a general practice in the Marina District in San Francisco where they served their clients through decades, if not generations. In one case, Ruth represented a widow who was a life tenant in a condominium. The remaindermen incessantly harassed her to release her interest. Ruth not only restrained the bad guys but obtained damages for the client's psychological trauma.

In the early 1970s, the California Legislature was host to a multitude of new bills which demanded a major change in the way women were treated by the law. Both Ruth and I frequently appeared before its committees to represent organizations in support of this proposed legislation. Chief among the bills was the Equal Rights Amendment. Our opponents insisted that equal rights would prohibit gender-separate toilets. Ruth convinced the Legislature that the concept of privacy would prevent that disaster.

A major women's focus was to eliminate the husband's management and control of community property and his right to "designate any reasonable place and mode of living, and the wife must conform thereto." Until no-fault divorce this statute had often been used by the errant husband who abandoned his wife, demanded she join him in a place where he knew she would not, and then petitioned for divorce on the grounds of desertion. We thought that even after no-fault, the statute should go. It did, partly through Ruth's efforts.

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\*Ruth Rymer (formerly Miller), JD, PhD, served as chair of the Family Law Advisory Commission to the Board of Legal Specialization, State Bar of California, (1977–1982), and is the author of the historical novel, *Susannah, A Lawyer* (2009).

The male legislators were astonished that there could be such a thing as a woman lawyer, or that she could make logical arguments. Ruth was particularly effective as a lobbyist for women. On one occasion, a legislator asked Ruth an irrelevant question and she, a good actress, replied, “Well, Your Honor . . .” She pretended to be flustered, but Ruth had so charmed him that he voted for our bill.

Ruth was a wonderful mentor to me. It was my privilege to have known her.

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*Oral History of***RUTH CHURCH GUPTA****(1917 – 2009)**

Q: Thank you very much for allowing us to interview you. We really appreciate it.

GUPTA: I'm certainly glad to be a part of history.

Q: I'd like to start asking you something about your childhood and your background. I think you were born in California, weren't you?

GUPTA: Yes, I'm one of those strange persons that was born in California. So were both my parents in the 1880s, and both my grandfathers in the 1850s.

Q: What part of the state did you grow up in?

GUPTA: I grew up in Northern California. I was born in Orland. Went to school in Yuba City. Then I went to college at Mills College.

Q: Were either of your parents attorneys?

GUPTA: Neither of my parents were attorneys. In fact, neither of them had a college education.

Q: How then were you inspired to go into law?

GUPTA: I had no intention whatever of going into law when I was in college. I was inspired to go to college by my parents who insisted that I have

an education. And I went into the business world out of college. When I married my husband, he was a law student at Hastings. He was drafted and went off into the Army. I was working for a lady who was an attorney in the business world. She inspired me. One day I marched into her office and said, "I quit. I'm going to law school," because I saw there was no future for me in that particular business world and decided to go to law school, just out of the blue.

Q: You said you went to Mills College. That's a women's college, isn't it?

GUPTA: That's correct.

Q: Did you receive any special encouragement for yourself, either in the business world or towards the professions at Mills?

GUPTA: Yes. I give Mills a great deal of credit for inspiring me to do whatever I wanted to do. Many of our class, although we graduated in 1938, which was before the women's revolution, were all encouraged to use our talents to the greatest of our ability. We had a really marvelous inspiration there.

Q: What was your major in college?

GUPTA: I had a double major of math and economics.

Q: Do you think that helped you at all, later on?

GUPTA: I think math is a marvelous preparation for law, because you learn logic and reasoning, the solution of problems, and it's quite similar to the law in many ways.

Q: Have you kept in touch with any of your classmates from Mills or from high school?

GUPTA: I kept in touch with Mills classmates. In fact, we have our fiftieth reunion coming up, and I'm the one who is supposed to be raising the money and organizing it. My college roommate and I have kept in very close touch, although she lives in Washington, D.C.

Q: What did your mother and father think when you decided you wanted to go to law school?

GUPTA: They were very pleased and very proud. When my husband came home from the Army I caught up with him, and we did the last two years

of law school together and graduated together. And when his mother and my parents were at the graduation, they were bursting with pride.

Q: If it isn't too personal, how did you meet your husband?

GUPTA: At a political meeting. We both were active in politics and involved in the Young Democrats.

Q: Once you graduated from law school, did you immediately begin your practice together?

GUPTA: We opened our office right here, where we still are. I continued to work for a few years and spent only part time in the office. My husband was keeping the office going. But we've been here at this same address since January 1949.

Q: For the record, that's 2237 Chestnut Street in San Francisco. Did you have any brothers or sisters?

GUPTA: I had two brothers, both of whom died in their twenties.

Q: Did your mother work outside the home?

GUPTA: Yes, she was a pioneer woman. In fact, she grew up in Mariposa and came down to San Francisco, went to secretarial school, got herself a job up in Quincy in the country, and that's where she met my father. She was very independent, in 1910 or so.

Q: I think we're finding in these interviews that lots of the women had very independent mothers. When you were in school — in grammar school and high school — did you have favorite subjects and things that you thought were especially interesting to you?

GUPTA: I was generally an A student, valedictorian in high school. I enjoyed Latin, Spanish, geography — everything, I think, was special. I wasn't an officer in any of the student organizations in high school. It was during the Depression and I spent some of my time working, as I did all through college.

Q: What kind of jobs did you have?

GUPTA: Anything I could get — babysitting, hashing, whatever.

Q: What years did you go to law school, and what was it like at that time?



GUPTA: When I started law school, it was during the war and it was a very small class of about twenty-five, of which there were about five or six women. Then the veterans came back and merged with our class, and we were then about a hundred. We didn't add any more women, so we were still only about four or five women in a class of a hundred. The class was in the mornings, and I would work in the afternoons. My husband would work from midnight to six, driving a truck for the newspapers. He would come home, we'd have breakfast together, go to class, have lunch together, he'd leave me off at work, he'd go home and go to bed, he'd have dinner ready when I got home, we'd study a bit, I'd go to bed, he'd go to work — for two solid years! We often joked that that's why we didn't have time to have a fight after he came back from the Army.

Q: Do you remember who the other women were in your law school class?

GUPTA: Jean Johnson, who later became Mrs. Jesse Carter, was one who finished, and Joel Brand, who I think practiced in San Bernardino for some time — I've lost track of her. And I don't remember any of the others.

Q: How were the five women in your class treated?

GUPTA: Well, some of the professors sort of ignored us. I personally didn't really feel any discrimination, as such. I think they didn't try to make it easy for us, but Dean [David E.] Snodgrass was the dean and he was notorious about making it tough for everybody. And I think that everybody felt they were being discriminated against, no matter who they were. He just felt that if you couldn't take that kind of bad treatment, you wouldn't get along very well in the law, so he was preparing us for it.

Q: What did employers think of women law students at that time?

GUPTA: Women law students and women lawyers had a very difficult time getting any type of job involving the law. They were always shuffled back to the back room or the library or something, and it was just almost out of the question to be treated equally.

Q: Was that one reason why you decided to open your own practice?

GUPTA: Yes, I felt there was no other way to get involved than to open our own practice, and I liked being independent, anyway, and being our own bosses.

Q: Did your practice start out as a general practice?

GUPTA: Yes, we opened our office here in the Marina District, which is a neighborhood, almost like a small town type practice, and we took anything that came in the door, although it was practically all civil. And it's remained pretty much a civil practice, although now I've gotten where I do nothing but probate, because I don't have time to do other things, and I'm able to turn away other kinds of work.

Q: Why did you choose Hastings?

GUPTA: I chose Hastings partly because that's where my husband had gone before, and also because the classes were all held in the morning, and it was possible to work part of the time and go to school part of the time, rather than to work all day and go to night law school.

Q: Do you have any particular memories of influential teachers you had at Hastings, Mills, or even at high school?

GUPTA: I had a marvelous high school teacher of Latin that I've always been grateful for, for helping me have a good vocabulary. All of my professors at Mills were very influential, I think, because we had a very good ratio of student to faculty, a very small student body, and we had a chance to communicate well with our professors. At Hastings, Dean Snodgrass started his "over sixty-five club," where he drafted many of the top professors throughout the nation who were required to retire at sixty-five, and he brought them to Hastings. So we had some really superb professors at Hastings.

Q: Do you remember who some of them were?

GUPTA: There was [Arthur] Cathcart, [Lawrence] Vold on Sales, [Edward] Thurston on Torts — those are the ones on my mind specifically.

Q: What did you like and dislike about your law school?

GUPTA: I can't remember anything specific that I liked or disliked. It was a very rough grind. Having been out of college for ten years before going back, it took a little while to get used to studying again, but once I got in the groove, that wasn't too difficult. And my husband and I had our own built-in briefing trust — we'd type our briefs up in duplicate, and take turns each week doing the different courses, so it helped on the homework.

Q: During the ten years between college and law school, you met your husband during that period of time with the Democratic Party. Were you active in the party with politics at that time?

GUPTA: Only with the Young Democrats. Later I became more active, when I ran for the Legislature in 1958.

Q: Was that for the Assembly from your district?

GUPTA: Yes.

Q: Tell me something about that race and how it went.

GUPTA: At that time, women weren't used to being candidates and people weren't used to giving a lot of money to women candidates, so it was a bit of a pioneering effort. It was the last year of the cross filing in California, which meant that in the primary, irrespective of which party you were registered in, you could vote for whomever you wished. I won the Democratic nomination. Milton Marks, who later went on to the Senate, won the Republican and beat me in the finals. It was a very interesting experience, since as I say, people weren't used to having women candidates at that time, in 1958.

Q: What were the issues that were talked about in that campaign, if you remember?

GUPTA: One of the major issues that really brought the vote out was the right to work, which was an anti-union measure that brought organized labor out in great quantity, and you had to take a stand on that one. There was also a big issue about water, which is still an issue — Southern California wanting Northern California's water. Those were the two big issues.

Q: Was your husband supportive in this campaign?

GUPTA: He has always been very, very supportive. In fact, whenever I falter, he gives me a swift kick and says, "Go on and do it."

Q: Did you take the bar exam right after law school, and what was the bar exam like at that time — was it three days, essay, what kind of test?

GUPTA: It was all essays, and three days.

Q: Were there bar preparation courses then?

GUPTA: Yes, I took the Witkin.

Q: Did Witkin himself teach them?

GUPTA: Yes.

Q: And did you immediately start practicing after passing the bar exam?

GUPTA: Yes, where I was working I was assigned some legal duties and their legal counsel was Pillsbury, Madison & Sutro, and I worked with them in anti-trust matters, and also took a few independent clients. But mostly I worked at night here at the office, working on briefs and helping out on things that my husband was working on, until, in 1954, I quit my job and worked full-time in the law practice.

Q: What were the attitudes of your clients towards you, as opposed to your husband, perhaps, as a woman attorney?

GUPTA: I don't think there's ever been any problem, although I suppose if someone didn't want a woman attorney, they'd stay away in the first place, so, it's hard to say whether or not I was discriminated against. I had a great many men clients, always have had. Originally I did a fair amount of divorce work, and I seemed to represent more men than women in the divorce cases. I often thought it was because they felt they needed a woman to fight the other woman.

Q: What were the attitudes of judges when you first began appearing in court?

GUPTA: There were a few old-fashioned judges that seemed to not be too receptive to women in court. Now, of course, most of the judges got out of law school long after I did, so they're quite used to having women appearing before them.

Q: What do you see as your biggest successes, and perhaps failures, in your law practice over the years?

GUPTA: Well, I think I've had some success in pioneering on behalf of women in getting them accepted. For about twenty-five years I was a part-time lobbyist, legislative advocate for the California Federation of Business and Professional Women's Clubs. In that capacity I worked on a lot of legislation on equal pay for equal work, legislation that revised the inheritance tax laws to eliminate some of the discrimination that widows had, and I'm particularly proud of the work that I did in that regard. I think I paved

the way, being the first woman on quite a number of various boards and commissions, and opening doors and making it perhaps easier for other women to step into these without so much discrimination.

Q: Now, of course, equal pay for equal work is part of our law. What was the attitude when you first started it in the Legislature?

GUPTA: You'd be surprised how many loopholes there were in the law, even then. It was a real uphill fight. It was almost unbelievable that there was so much discrimination. In such things as factory work, they'd always bring up the issue of all the special legislation. For example, there was weight-lifting legislation that said women couldn't lift more than twenty-five pounds, and there wasn't any such restriction for men. So that was always a nice excuse, whether or not any woman actually lifted twenty-five pounds. I always pointed out that it seemed whenever a man had to pick up a typewriter or something like that, he always managed to get a dolly or something like that to haul it, that he didn't actually carry it himself. Also, the hours legislation — there was an eight-hour law that said women couldn't work more than eight hours, and no such restriction on the men. This was supposed to be primarily against factory workers, but was applied beyond, into the offices. Again, that was an excuse — that women couldn't get beyond the middle management stage because they'd always say, if we get into a jam we have to work at night, and the women can't work, so that was a good excuse not to promote them into middle management.

Q: Aside from being the lobbyist for the Business and Professional Women's Clubs, weren't you a president of that organization?

GUPTA: Yes, I was the president of the State of California Federation, and I was active on the national level in political action. I was vice chair and helped organize the political action committee for the National Federation.

Q: Can you describe what that group has done?

GUPTA: The California Federation was the first one to have a political action committee, and collected money to help women candidates for the State Legislature. Then on the national level, it did the same kind of thing, and formed PAC — a political action committee, qualified under the national regulations for PACs — and collected fairly substantial sums of money to give to women candidates for the U.S. Senate and Congress.

Q: How did you become the lobbyist for the state group?

GUPTA: Well, I was always interested in legislation, and I guess that was sort of a natural thing to get involved in, and I was appointed advocate shortly after I had joined and stayed in office for all those years.

Q: Do you think being a lawyer helped in that position?

GUPTA: Oh yes, no question that it was extremely helpful.

Q: Do you think being a lawyer helped in the other positions you held with other groups?

GUPTA: I think there's no question that the legal education opened doors for me that don't get opened so easily for other people. Whether or not you practice law, I think a legal education is an outstanding kind of education and background to have.

Q: I see from your résumé that you were also active in various conservation kinds of causes. Can you describe those?

GUPTA: After the 1958 election, Governor Pat Brown appointed me to the Water Pollution Control Board for the [San Francisco] Bay Area. There had never been a woman on that board before. So that was another door opener. I kind of gravitated from that into air pollution, and the Lung Association which worked on air pollution. I've served on the State Water Quality Control Board, and on the Lung Association's National Air Conservation Commission. So I got involved in both water and air pollution.

Q: Can you tell me how the practice of law in San Francisco has changed, and perhaps how the city has changed over the years, since you've started?

Q: I'm reminded of the old story about the old man who said he'd seen a lot of changes and he'd been against every one of them. I think law practice has changed considerably in that it's not as friendly as it used to be, and is much more mechanized. Of course the whole computer age has made a difference, and the Judicial Council and their darned required forms have made a difference. And there have been many, many changes in the law. I think the law in virtually every area has changed from the time that I studied in law school, so it's a constant question of taking courses to keep up with all the changes, particularly in the field in which you have specific interest. There are many, many more women, of course, practicing.

Now, many times you'll be in court and the entire cast of characters will be women — the judges, the clerks, the reporters, the counsel.

Q: That really has been a big change. When you first started practicing here in San Francisco, did you know most of the lawyers in town?

GUPTA: It seemed like it, and that's another one of the differences. In the probate area I see pretty much the same lawyers all the time. It used to be I knew virtually all the lawyers who were active in the practice, I knew all the women lawyers, I was president of Queen's Bench. There were only about two hundred members of Queen's Bench at that time, and that took in the entire Bay Area. I think there are some eight hundred or so now.

Q: What was Queen's Bench like, aside from the number of members? What kind of meetings did you have, what kind of issues did you explore?

GUPTA: We tended to stay away from the controversial issues. Most of the speakers that we had would talk on various aspects of the law that we were trying to get more information about, more education about. It was also a very social group, the idea being that we found a lot of support from our fellow practitioners, and we could always call them up and ask them questions, where we might be too timid to call up a man to ask the same question.

Q: Were you president of the Lawyers Club of San Francisco after or before Queen's Bench?

GUPTA: About fourteen years afterwards.

Q: And what led to your interest in that organization, what were its activities like, and how did it feel to be the first woman president?

GUPTA: It was kind of exciting to be the first woman president. I'd been on the Board of Governors for six or seven years, and there had only been one other woman on the Board of Governors at that time. Ed Towers invited me. By that time, women were being pretty much treated equally. There just weren't that many around who were ready to move in, or had the experience and exposure to be in a position to take leadership roles. They were pretty experimental in the field.

Q: Did your colleagues address the issue, currently very hot in the women's community, of private clubs and discrimination by private clubs against women and other minorities?

GUPTA: No, those weren't issues at all.

Q: When I look at your résumé and consider your really outstanding legal career, I think that if you had been a man and interested, you would have been a judge. Is that something that interested you, or something that was possible for you?

GUPTA: I really never wanted to be a judge. The one thing I don't think I'd like is to punch a time clock, which judges have to do, and account for the amount of work they have to do. It's more interesting to be independent. If I hadn't been independent, I couldn't have had all the experiences I've had at the Legislature, and on the various boards and commissions I've served on. I've had a lot of freedom to do these things because of being in independent, private practice. We sort of have an expression, that we practice just enough law to support our hobbies, and we're not trying to get rich, so we don't count the hours that you have to when you're working for somebody else.

Q: Ruth, did you have any children?

GUPTA: No.

Q: Was that a decision based partly on the practice?

GUPTA: It just worked out that way.

Q: That's something that I'm finding takes a great deal of time. I would like to get into your activities with the State Bar. Could you describe your activities with the State Bar of California?

GUPTA: I think my first committee assignment was on the Family Law Committee that I served on for three years. I had attended the Conference of Delegates, almost every year since about 1951 or '52, so I'd always been interested in the activities of the Bar and the Conference. And because of my legislative activities with Business and Professional Women, and because of my activities with the Conference of Delegates Executive Committee, I got to working fairly closely with the Board of Governors, appearing at most of their meetings on behalf of the Conference Executive Committee, and then at a time when the State Bar's legislative advocate resigned to take another job, I served as a part time legislative advocate for the State Bar. And it was after that that I decided to run for the Board of Governors, and was elected unopposed, fortunately.



Q: How were you appointed to the [Conference of Delegates] Executive Committee?

GUPTA: The Executive Committee is elected by the districts. I was the candidate from District Four, which is in San Francisco.

Q: Had you served on the Resolutions Committee before that?

GUPTA: No, I hadn't.

Q: Was that unusual at that time? I know now most of the people come from the Resolutions Committee to the Executive Committee.

GUPTA: Yes, I think it was unusual.

Q: What was it like to chair that conference? I was there, and was really proud of how you did. It was really exceptional. I'd been to a few conferences before then, and it was really very special to watch you in action.

GUPTA: Thank you. I couldn't have done it if I hadn't had my experience of women's organizations, and specifically Business and Professional Women, where I presided over some pretty tough situations, and learned my parliamentary law, and a sense of competence. I really enjoyed it. It was very challenging. I'd seen some top people preside at prior conferences and always admired them, and I guess without realizing it, I probably aspired to it for a long time.

Q: Was it particularly fun to have your husband be one of the delegation chairs and to have to control him as far as the proceedings?

GUPTA: I remember, I think I ruled him out of order twice. One time, he started to speak without giving his name, and I asked him to state his name, and he said, "The same as yours, Madam Chair."

Q: I recall that. Are there any other things you want to do in the legal profession at this time?

GUPTA: I've been attending the meetings of the International Bar Association; I'm on the House of Delegates of the American Bar [Association]. The American Bar is about where the California Bar was twenty or thirty years ago. There are very few women in positions of power in the American Bar, and they are just starting to get there.

Q: When you were on the State Bar Board of Governors, what were the issues that the Governors were addressing for those years?

GUPTA: They were mostly administrative problems of the usual crunch of not having enough money to do all the kinds of things that we wanted to do. Specialization was a big issue. I had opposed specialization. In our third year on the Board, Dale Hanst appointed me chair of the Committee of Professional Standards which dealt with specialization and I assured him that even though I lost out on the vote, that in reality I wanted to make it a good program as much as possible. That was quite a challenge. Also mandatory legal education was an issue, and there was legislation pending. I also opposed that and was successful in getting that headed off for the time being, convincing the author of the legislation that it didn't guarantee competence and that there were better ways to guarantee competence, which we all agreed was the objective.

Q: I know that many women in the state were hoping that you would be the first woman president of the State Bar. What led to your decision regarding running for the presidency?

GUPTA: Mainly, I didn't have the votes.

Q: And how did you determine that?

GUPTA: The person who was elected president had been lining up his votes well in advance and I had not. He apparently had them all convinced that he was prepared to do the job. The fact that I was virtually a sole practitioner, at least in a small office, meant that I might not have the same amount of time to devote as someone coming from a large office. The fact that the president would, in effect, have to take off a year to devote to the State Bar may have had something to do with it. Although in the following year Burke Critchfield was elected president, and he was a sole practitioner and he proved that it could be done.

Q: Maybe the time just wasn't ripe. Have you been active in any groups we haven't discussed yet? You have such an extensive résumé. I'd like you to look at it and describe some of the activities that we haven't discussed directly.

GUPTA: Oh, yes. I was on the Constitution Revision Commission, which was a very interesting assignment, appointed by the Legislature, to make proposals for revision of the State Constitution. That was quite a blue ribbon commission — we worked for almost ten years, proposing various changes which were taken to the voters.

When I was appointed by the secretary of state, March Fong Eu, to the State Board of Control, I was the only woman ever to serve on that. That was a three-person board, composed of the state controller, the state director of General Services, and a public member. I was appointed by the governor on that one, not March Fong Eu. And I was also removed by the governor. The appointment was at the pleasure of the governor, and it no longer pleased him when I voted for a per diem raise for state employees when they travel. The governor didn't like that, and removed me. After that, the Legislature then changed that term to be a term appointment, rather than serving at the pleasure of the governor. March Fong Eu appointed me to the Fair Political Practices Commission. I served on that for a while. I had to resign that when I became a member of the Board of Governors of the State Bar because that was a conflict of interest.

I was on the advisory board of the California Highway Patrol. When the issue came up regarding the hiring of women officers, women's organizations such as NOW [National Organization for Women] and others had filed a lawsuit to compel the Highway Patrol to hire women. The Patrol was very dead set against it. So the Legislature appointed a committee. It was composed of both men and women who worked for a year, developing a good deal of research. Judge Joan Dempsey Klein chaired that committee. There was a particular group who were picked at first, and we monitored how they managed in all the various tests that they had to go through in the training school and their performance on the job.

Then the Equal Rights Amendment became an issue, and I was lobbying for it as a professional. At that time we got California to ratify the Equal Rights Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, and the Legislature then appointed an advisory committee to go over various codes of the State of California to eliminate the references to discrimination on the basis of sex. In other words, eliminate the sexist language, take out the "he" and "him" and so forth — change all those words so they were non-sexist. Yes, I was on that committee. It was composed of legislators and lay people.

I was president of the San Francisco Council of District Merchants' Associations. Here in the Marina District there's a Merchants' Association as there is in each of the various some twelve or so districts in the city. The local merchants were having problems trying to get their point of view over at City Hall at the Board of Supervisors, often coming up against the

Chamber of Commerce in various issues that affected the small merchant. So I was instrumental in helping to organize the Council of all the various local merchants' associations throughout the city, and we got to be a fairly strong voice in City Hall representing small business. So I served on that and I still am a delegate to that, but I served as president for one year.

I was also president of the Northern California Service League, which was an organization that was organized by Justice [Raymond] Peters to help county jail inmates, and we did a lot of work trying to get educational opportunities and rehabilitative opportunities for the county jail inmates. We studied the conditions of the jail and were instrumental in getting a change in the person elected sheriff of the City and County of San Francisco because of the way the jail had been run at that time.

Mayor [Dianne] Feinstein appointed me to the Parking Authority of the City and County of San Francisco. I guess I was the only woman who had ever served on that also. That was an outgrowth of my work with the District Merchants' Associations.

I also served one year as secretary of the Alumni Association of Hastings, and in 1981 I was named Alumnus of the Year from the Alumni Association.

Q: I know that many of the lawyers in California look up to you as a role model. Who were your role models as a lawyer?

GUPTA: The woman that I worked for, that I mentioned, is a lawyer — Hazel Harvey. She had gone to night school while she worked. She was the purchasing agent and personnel director, and I worked for her for a number of years. She was a role model for me, although she was not a practicing lawyer. Many of the lawyers I had gotten acquainted with at Queen's Bench had been very helpful to me as mentors in many ways. I can't mention anyone particularly because there were any number of them who were very helpful.

Q: Can you think of any advice you'd like to give young women who are thinking of law as a possible profession?

GUPTA: I think it's a marvelous profession for women, because I think a woman's sensitivity makes her particularly capable of working with people when they are in a time of need and have problems. I think we have to be careful not to overemphasize the fact that we are women. We are lawyers,

whether we are male or female. And I think that most of the women who are practicing now are very professional. I am very proud of the way they conduct themselves. Fresh in my memory is the recent Conference of Delegates that took place in Los Angeles. I think the women who spoke out on the floor were just outstanding, the way they handled themselves. I was thinking back to thirty years ago, when I first started going to these conferences. Very few women dared to speak on the floor and when they did, they had none of the same professional attitude that the women do now. I think it is really gratifying to see what has happened.

Q: What direction would you like the State Bar to take?

GUPTA: First, to survive. I think the integrated Bar may very well be on its way out and I think it would be a terrible mistake, because the Bar could never accomplish the things that it does if it didn't have the financial support of all the lawyers. I think lawyers have a professional obligation to serve the general public. A great many lawyers who practice law take no part in activities at all in the profession and spend all their time just earning a living. I think it's unfortunate if the integrated bar goes down the drain because of what the Legislature's attitude is these days. A voluntary bar in no way could accomplish the things we've done. We'd end up with a plaintiffs' bar and a defense bar and a this bar and a that bar and we wouldn't have the cohesiveness that we were able to get through the State Bar, and in particular the Conference of Delegates, where the various local bar associations can get together. The small bars would be just left out and the whole thing would be dominated by the large county bars that are very active and well organized now. So I hope that the State Bar is able to survive this onslaught that the Legislature seems to be after the Bar, trying to put them down.

Q: With your experience as a lobbyist, do you have any advice or tactics to use in this?

GUPTA: I think lawyers have to get more political and better acquainted with members of the Legislature. I think they should take part in political campaigns so that when they pick up the phone to call a legislator, the legislator knows who they are and will feel somewhat obligated to them for possibly having some influence on a certain number of voters. It's not just the financial contributions that legislators need; they also need the bodies

and names of people who will be helpful. And if we were more active politically as individuals, not as an organized Bar, but as individuals, I think we would have more respect in the eyes of the legislators.

Q: Looking back at your career, is there anything you wish you'd done differently?

GUPTA: I probably wouldn't do anything differently than I did, because every move that you make seems to be brought on in part by your own volition, and part on where you happen to be at the time. Opportunities come up; you either take advantage of them or you don't. I would like to have been president of the State Bar, but the timing was not right. That's just one of those things. I know there will be a woman president very soon, because women are getting there and that's great. As far as different decisions I would have made, I can't think of any.

Q: Is there anything you'd like to add?

GUPTA: Just that I'm proud to have been a lawyer and to have been a part of what's happening in the almost forty years now. I look forward to continued improvement in the status of women because of the quality of the women who are coming up and taking an active leadership role. I'm very proud that we're going to have another woman chair of the Conference of Delegates next year. To me, that's a tribute to what's happened and it's very exciting news.

Q: Thank you again for taking your time. With all you have to do, we really appreciate the time you've taken this afternoon.

GUPTA: Thank you. It's been a real pleasure.

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