Law Women's Caucus Third Annual Alumnae Recognition Reception

April 14, 2008

**Sahar Fathi:** Hello. Good evening. Welcome to the Law Women's Caucus' third annual Alumni Recognition Reception. I am Sahar Fathi. I am one of the co-presidents of the Law Women's Caucus.

I don't have a name tag. I am probably the only person here without a name tag. I think that was kind of on purpose, to make sure that I stand out. But I'm really grateful, because there's a lot of stickers that go on those name tags, and I don't really know what I want to do with my life, so I would have had to put all of them on there, and then you guys all would have been really dizzy and crazy and all trying to talk to me, and I wouldn't be able to handle that.

So, [laughs] tonight, we're honoring two outstanding women in the legal field. We're honoring Brenda Williams and the honorable Betty Fletcher. Before we start, I'd like to take a moment to thank all of the people who made tonight possible.

So, to our sponsors, the Washington Law School Foundation, the University of Washington School of Laws' Office of Development and External Relations, King County Washington Women Lawyers, Washington Women Lawyer Foundation, the Great Lumber Company. And then, also, I want to thank the LWC Steering Committee, all the members of LWC who donated their time.

I want to thank, in particular, the Alumni Recognition Committee, which is Alicia and Zosia, and my co-president, Annie. And I really want to thank Megan Vogel, because I feel like every event that happens in the law school happens, to some part, because of Megan Vogel, so we're just going to thank Megan Vogel. [laughs]

[applause]

**Sahar:** And then, finally, we're going to thank faculty and, of course, the women who founded the Law Women's Caucus and all of you who participated over the years.

Tonight, in the audience, we have students who've just started law school, we have people who are in the middle of their second year, people who are about to leave law school, take the bar, women who have been practicing for a few years, attorneys, judges, deans, professors with...
distinguished careers. All of you are incredible.

And it's amazing to see how far we've come. The first law school class, in 1899, had three women. And I emailed Kathy Swinehart last week and was told that this year 66 percent of the One-L class was women, which is 120 women. That's a lot. And I think this actually explains a lot of the phenomena that have been going on recently.

If you attended the annual Law School Gala on Saturday, you would have noticed the overwhelming receipt of honors to women in the awards ceremony. So, our very own LWC co-president, Jill Mullins, and the former LWC Alumni Committee Chair Megan Vogel won President Intra-Students of the Year. Lisa Kremer, who's a longstanding LWC board member, took the award on behalf of parents at the law school for organization of the year.

So, essentially, what I gather is that women are taking over the school and the LWC is taking over the awards.

[laughter]

**Sahar:** This is my confession for the evening: I hated law school my first year. I really wanted to drop out. And don't look at me like you didn't want to drop out, either. I know all of you wanted to drop out. [laughs] I came to UW because I wanted to make a difference and I wanted to save the world. And it was really hard my first year, and it was competitive in fields that I didn't want to compete in at all. It was mandatory, and no one was saving the world in Civ Pro I, which shocked me. I don't understand why. [laughs] Exactly. [laughs]

And so I kind of wished that there had been a handbook for my first year and that there had been a self-help section and there were books with titles, "Don't Drop Out Yet," and maybe an index of phone numbers that the law librarians could have led us to of people to call when you're freaked out your One-L year.

And the basic idea is that no one really tells you that your first year of law school is going to be incredibly hard, and nobody really says, "It's supposed to be hard," because if it wasn't hard, we wouldn't have a market for this kind of reception. So we kind of have to make things difficult, so then I can come out and have all these sponsors come and pay for things, and then you guys can all get awards. And it all just makes the world go round.

And I know a lot of you don't think that you do anything extraordinarily hard during the course of your day. I talk to a lot of people who are like, "Oh, I'm just a lawyer. I work 50 to 60 hours a week, and somehow manage to keep up with my personal hygiene and eat." I don't know how
they do that. Or, you know, you're a professor, and you have to deal with classes and students and office hours and advising, and then your family, and at some point, you have to sleep. How do you schedule that in?

And then there's, of course, the mothers, who are students, and they're experts and they're doing reading, and they're making sure that they're home in time to take care of the kids and cook dinner and run some student organization on the side. Which, in the end of it all, it blows me away. And I don't think it's a competition at all. It's not about that. It's about doing what you love and finding a way to do it. And then it's about finding people in your life who are supportive of those things.

LWC was that for me. And I am proud to be a part of this community, and I'm grateful for the support I have received through the Law Women's Caucus. And I can't even begin to say how proud I am of all the women on the Steering Committee and the way that they've worked together to make a difference for all of you tonight.

So, thank you for coming. I hope we can continue this tradition for many years to come. Have fun. And our next presenter is going to be Christie Fix, the future law clerk for Judge Fletcher.

[applause]

Christie Fix: Thanks, Sahar. I'm Christie Fix, and I'm a Three-L here at the law school. And I want to thank the Law Women's Caucus for inviting me to introduce the honorable Betty Binns Fletcher, for whom I will have the great, good fortune of clerking next year.

Judge Fletcher epitomizes the words "distinguished alumni." During her extremely accomplished 50-year legal career, she has been a pioneer for women in the legal profession and a model for a life lived in a public service. She graduated from this law school in 1956, at the top of her class, while, at the same time, being the mother of four small children.

Her career is marked by firsts. She was the first woman partner in a major Northwest law firm. She was the first woman president of the King County Bar Association. She was the first woman governor of the Washington State Bar Association. And she also served on the ethics committee of the American Bar Association.

In 1979, she was appointed to the Ninth Circuit by President Jimmy Carter. And although she assumed senior status in 1998, she has maintained a very active caseload, and she has written very important opinions on questions of civil rights, employment discrimination, immigration law, free speech, and environmental law, among many others. In addition to these
accomplishments, Judge Fletcher has been a staunch supporter of this law school throughout her career. Most recently, she has served on the Dean Search Committee for the law school.

Through her many professional and service activities, Judge Fletcher has had a profound influence on a generation of lawyers in this community, and she is well-deserving of the award that she receives tonight. Please welcome the honorable Betty Binns Fletcher.

[applause]

Sahar: And so, before you begin, we'd like to give you this award, Distinguished Alumni. And thank you so much. And it comes in its own box.

[laughter]

Judge Betty Binns Fletcher: Oh, it's beautiful. Thank you. Thank you.

Sahar: Thank you so much.

Judge Fletcher: It's my pleasure to accept this honor. Really, it's kind of an accidental award. I was the first in all these things because I was the only woman around.

[laughter]

Judge Fletcher: You know, tonight, I have no really prepared remarks, but I thought I'd just maybe reminisce with you a little bit about what the law school was like when I went to law school and the changes that I've perceived.

You know, well, first, I'll tell you how I got admitted. I had had a year of law school at Stanford as an undergraduate. They had let me in because all the men had gone off to war. So I did one year. And then I married my husband, who was in the Navy, and had four children, and then decided it was time to come back to law school.

So I walked into the dean's office, and I said, "I'd like to start law school again." And he said, "Well, we have an LSAT we give now. Have you taken that?" And I said, "No. I've never even heard of it."

[laughter]
Judge Fletcher: So he said, "Well, how did you do in that first year of law school?" And I said, "Well, I did pretty well." And so he said, "Well, come on. Start classes, and then you've got to take the LSAT."

[laughter]

Judge Fletcher: So that's how it went. That's how I got into the law school.

We were in old, old Condon Hall. We weren't over there in the barracks. We were really central-campus right across from the library--beautiful, beautiful library. We had workroom; everything was just beautiful. But I won't go into the detail of how some of everybody got pushed off campus and into the wilderness. But it's good to have you all back here in this beautiful space. It's really wonderful.

Well, you'd probably like to know how many women were in my class. We were three, only three. People have asked me, "Well, did you feel or suffer discrimination in law school?" And I said, "Well, I came in for a bit of kind of kidding, actually, joking.

One of the people who we always called--the Trethaway Rules happened because Trethaway always did something bad. So we couldn't park on campus anymore. And we couldn't do this or we couldn't do that because there was a new Trethaway Rule that happened.

He always--they posted our grades by number on the bulletin board. And he would take great pains to cross-reference and figure out so then he could tell everybody what their grades were.

[laughter]

Judge Fletcher: And he always called me Mom. He would call me Mom from great distances. I tried to tell him that I actually had a name but he never used it. But actually apart from some kind of kidding and joking I really didn't feel discrimination. And oddly once they, once Trethaway told them what my grades were I began to get invitations to study groups.

[laughter]

Judge Fletcher: But in any event, where discrimination came for me was when I went out to get my first job. We had a rather informal system of job placement in the law school at that time.

There was one professor who was in charge of it. And you went in and you told him where you
thought you wanted to practice. And if it was Yakama he knew somebody in Yakama. If it was Spokane, he knew somebody there.

I went in and told him that I wanted to work in Seattle. And he said, "Oh, fine, fine." I noticed my classmates getting invitations to interviews; nothing for me. I never heard a word. I was walking down the faculty corridor one day and I heard him say, "Well, you wouldn't consider a woman, would you?" And so I knew that there was never going to be a job interview for me that way.

So, I asked my classmates where they were interviewing. And they were very gracious to tell me. So I took my resume and I would go in just cold-turkey. And I'd ask the receptionist to see the hire-in lawyer. And they would all immediately think that what secretary was getting fired?

[laughter]

**Judge Fletcher:** But I would get in to see the hire-in lawyer. And I would sell myself. But they would always say, "Well, that's just a very interesting resume you have. You should be very proud of it. But I just don't think that a law firm could really accommodate a woman, particularly a woman with four children. You certainly have got some priorities there and you just simply wouldn't fit in to the law."

So, I was pretty discouraged until I went to the Preston firm--Preston Thurginson of the World. Well, it's about time. It's now K and L Gates and I assume many of you know the firm now has 1500 plus lawyers. But at that time it was--they had seven lawyers at that time.

And one of the young partners, Jim Ellis, and I kind of clicked. And he said, "Why I'm going to take you in to see the other partners." And I met all the other partners and they all said, "Well, it's a very interesting resume."

[laughter]

**Judge Fletcher:** But Charlie would never think of a woman being hired by a firm. Charlie Worawitz was not there.

So, I went back out to the law school and talked with the professor with whom I had some rapport and who knew quite a bit about the firms downtown. And I told him my sad tail. And he said, "Well, the Law Review Banquet is coming up next week. You be sure to come. Charlie always comes to the Law Review Banquet and I will see that you sit by him. And you sell yourself."
So, that happened and I sat by Charlie Worawitz and I went about selling myself. And after a few minutes he looked at me and he said, "Who's your father?" And I told him who my father was. Then he said, "You know, this Jewish boy would never have become a Rhode Scholar if it hadn't been for your father." And so I got my job.

[laughter]

**Judge Fletcher:** But it was the old-boy network. It wasn't merit. It wasn't anything else. So, anyway that's how it all came about. And in the law firm, I felt I had to work harder, do better than anybody else or I wasn't really going to succeed in the end.

But Charlie was the president of the local Bar Association. And he came into my office on day--not that I didn't have enough to do--and said, "You know, the Bar Association has never had a newspaper. So, you're going to be the editor."

So, that kind of took my breath away because I really had a lot of briefing and hard work to do. Although at that point I was still not being allowed to see clients. I was doing work that I would hand out to others who would be presenting it.

But I took that as an opportunity to get acquainted and to meet other lawyers and to meet judges. I would go around on a little beat to see who had news for me and put together a newspaper. So, in the end it turned out to be a good thing.

And my big break in the law firm came on a sunny Friday afternoon, I think in May. And oddly enough all of the lawyers were gone playing golf.

[laughter]

**Judge Fletcher:** But there I was. And the receptionist came back and said, "I don't know what to do. The president or the vice president of Metropolitan Life insurance Company is here and wants to see the lawyer who does his work." He'd come out from New York.

And so I said, "Well, bring him in. I've been doing his work all right."

[laughter]
Judge Fletcher: I'd been doing it and handing it to Mr. Preston who was presenting it. So, I was able to run down the cases that we had in the office. And that was my big break.

I then was allowed to see clients. And they invited me--Metropolitan Life Insurance Company--called Mr. Preston and said they would like me to come to New York and meet their legal staff. So, that was really the beginning for me.

So, I guess that's enough of reminiscing. I've had a wonderful career. And when I had an opportunity to go to the Court, it was a real, in a way, wrenching, because I'd become attached to my clients. I loved my partners and I'd helped to build a big practice. But service on the Court is not only an honor but it's an opportunity in a way to do a little good here and there.

So I guess that that's all that I can say. I'd be happy to answer any questions. But thank you for this nice award.

[applause]

Sahar: Our next introduction will be given by C.J. Valdez, who is general counsel for the Zella Company and president of LBAW.

C.J. Valdez: Hello. Can you guys here me OK? I have a loud voice so I'm not shy. So, I hope you can hear me.

So, good evening. I'm C.J. Valdez and I'm the current president of the Latina/Latino Bar Association of Washington and the general counsel of the Zella Company. And tonight I have the great privilege of introducing Brenda Williams.

I had the pleasure of meeting Brenda during my law school years while she was trying to buy a large group of Latina/Latino Bar--Latina/Latino students to a potluck during the middle of our finals.

And it was a bit intimidating because you know, there come Brenda sending you an email. You know, she's part of the LBAW board and what-not. And she was very persistent, you know. And asking how many were going to make it, who were going to make it, how important it was and what-not. So, she's you know, amazing.

The proud daughter of Mexican and German parents, she left the lasting impression on me with her dynamic persistence and just getting me involved in this event. And I think that as I got to
know her and have gone to grow with her as well, I've learned that she is amazing. She can sacrifice her evenings, her weekends. Always available to share wisdom, provide advice, or just simply listen.

And so, I think for those of us who know Bren, they can admit that she is a force to be reckoned with [laughs] whose passion for life is unseeingly recognizing her career, volunteer work, and mentorship.

Originally a California native, Bren moved to Seattle in 1989. She attended the University here for a Bachelor's Degree in poly-sci. And she also came here for her Master's in Public Administration and JD in 1997.

When she graduated she then took a job with the Defenders Association, where she was there for over 10 plus years.

But I will take the time to mention that during law school, Brenda along with two other people as you'll read in the bio, included in the program, was responsible for initiating and implementing the National Latina/Latino Law School Conference.

Which since then has gone to very competitive conference with many law schools bidding to see who can host--I mean it's about 200 or so law students, Latino law students who show up to these conferences.

So, that's, you know--from the get-go, Brenda was already involved and doing a million things and moving and shaking people. So, after her graduation she went to the Defender's Association. There she's worked with misdemeanor, felony, juvenile, dependent offenders, the legal intern supervisor and most recently the special offender commitment defender.

So, in addition to her work as a public defender, Brenda takes the time somewhere to also teach at the University of Washington Education Outreach Paralegal Study Certificate Program. She plans courses, grades, and does all sorts of the regular [indiscernible] of the actual students.

And if that wasn't enough, Brenda also has part-time role at the Administrative Lodge at the Office of Administrative Hearings working with conclusions of law and findings of fact regarding unemployment benefit hearings.

Brenda continues to remain active in the legal community while she reinvents herself and her
volunteer in social causes. She's currently serving on the Central La Drasa board, the Seattle Central Community College Foundation, and a dedicated member of the Washington State Bar Association Board of Governors as a Governor.

But beyond her many accolades, she's an amazing woman whose passion for teaching and leading others into public service as seen in everything she does. Everything is intentional. Everything is a passion. And that's just the way Brenda is.

She serves as a mentor to a handful of the Latino law students--some men, some female, but mostly the females--always taking the time to promote their participation in not only the profession but in taking the time to invest in themselves with just community service and things that are of purpose.

Without a doubt that she is a special role model who leaves a lasting impression on everybody that knows her. That's, you know--I just really think that the University's happy and proud to have someone like Brenda representing them out there.

So, she's certainly deserving of this award. And without anything else, I just want to introduce Brenda.

[applause]

Sahar: And Brenda the same for you.

Brenda Williams: Thank you.

Sahar: And the award's for you. And again, carrying case.

Brenda: I get the carrying case? Thank you very much. Thank you. Wow. Thank you, C.J.

I just want to mention that I don't actually sacrifice my evenings and weekends, I just drag my husband and baby along with me.

[laughter]

Brenda: And that sort of just makes it all seem like family time. And I would've brought my daughter but she had a fever, so she's with Grandma tonight.
So, I want to thank you for this honor. And in particular, thank you to the Law Women's Caucus for this recognition.

When I moved out of my parents' house at 18 from--moving from Southern California to Seattle, I wasn't sure if I wanted to become a doctor, or a lawyer, or a something else. No one in my family had yet--had completed college, let alone graduate school.

So I had to navigate the system of higher education on my own--seeking out mentors when it was appropriate--but for the most part learning by trial and error. And that meant making mistakes; sometimes a lot of mistakes.

And although I am fortunate now that I received my undergraduate degree from the University of Washington and my two graduate degrees, the experience left me knowing that there was a serious need for mentors.

In particular, mentors that were not part of the same usual club. And so I began to reach out to women and to other minorities that were pursuing similar educational goals. And I wanted to reach out to them to let them know what had worked for me. And sometimes just to reassure.

This was part of my motivation and collaborating to found the National Latina/Latino Law Student Conference. When I was in law school 12 year ago. Emphasis on the Latina, which comes first in the title--which people point out often that's not grammatically correct. But it is what it is. And we named it the National Latina/Latino Law Student Conference for a reason.

And I am proud to say that the National Association which is now in its fifth year and handling close to $100,000 per year has been shared by only female law student leaders, although the leadership positions are opened to all.

Through the Alumni Association I've been fortunate enough to mentor a number of young women. And I really hope that my working with students is helpful to them. But what I gain from that is actually the more important thing. And I gain the community of working with future women lawyers and I also enjoy the times that we spend laughing and living together.

Organizations such as the UW's Law Women's Caucus which promote mutual support and encouragement are so essential to the success of future women lawyers and also the successful integration of the profession by women.
So I encourage all of you to continue the work that you are doing to create a more inclusive legal system, a more inclusive legal profession. And to step back and be proud of your accomplishments that you've achieved so far. And when you graduate don't hesitate to reach back in much the same way to the students that are coming behind you, the future law students of tomorrow.

Thank you again for this wonderful award. I'm very honored, extremely honored to receive it tonight. Thank you.

[applause]

Aniva Thigh: Hello, I'm Aniva Thigh, the co-president of the Law Women's Caucus. On behalf of LWC, I'd like to thank our speakers for their very inspiring words this evening. I am thrilled that we were able to honor two such outstanding women this evening.

I'd also like to recognize the generosity again of our sponsors, the Law School Foundation, the Office of Development and External Relations here at the law school, Washington Women Lawyers, King County, Washington--excuse me, the King County Chapter of Washington Women Lawyers and Gray Lumber.

And I'd also like to recognize again the generosity of the time and spirit of our committee. Without their generosity this evening could not happen.

I'd also like to thank all of you for taking the time out of your very busy schedules to connect with our alumnae community. I hope you can join us all for the reception that follows in the Perkins Career Room. There'll be light refreshments and drinks as well. And it will be a great chance to connect with your fellow alumni and to draw some inspiration from the stories that you hear.

I'd like to thank you all again for coming. And I hope that we will see you all next year. Thanks so much.

[applause]