

Women in the Law

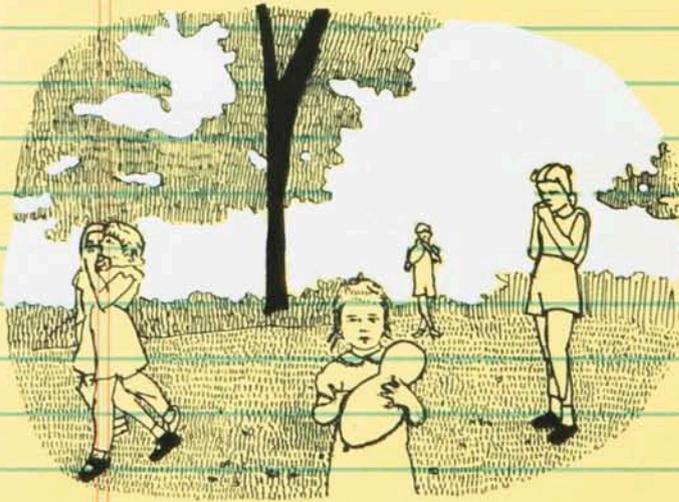
does that mean me?



Studying. all I did in
law school was
study



this was soon after
I met my husband.



raising five children



Women in the law committee

I graduated from law school 23 years ago. I haven't practiced law for 20 years. Instead, I married and have been at home raising five children. So, when I asked myself the question "Do I belong in a female legal society?" the answer was "I don't think so."

Initially after I quit practicing law, fellow lawyers would invite me to things. After a while that stopped. After a while longer, I quit thinking of myself as a lawyer. Over half the people I knew probably had no idea I was a lawyer. That was fine with me. I didn't feel like a lawyer any more.

So what changed? Why am I thinking and writing about this now? Bill Atkin, associate general counsel for the Church and a member of the executive committee of the J. Reuben Clark Law Society, asked me to serve as chair of the Women in the Law committee for the Phoenix Chapter of the Law Society. At first I thought he was joking. Me? Chairing a Women in the Law committee? I laughed. He persisted. I said yes.

The question that came to mind was "What could a Women in the Law committee do for me, a stay-at-home wife, mother, and lawyer?" The second question (and I am sad to say it wasn't the first) was "What could I, as a stay-at-home wife, mother, and lawyer, do for Women in the Law?" I have thought a great deal about those two questions. Before I could answer either of them, I had to do some soul-searching.

For years I felt like I had disappointed the J. Reuben Clark

Law School and its faculty by not practicing law and choosing instead to stay at home. These feelings were so strong I didn't enjoy visiting the school or talking to former professors. I happened to be at the Law School one day because my husband (also a lawyer and currently serving as a judge) was involved in a moot court competition. While there, I summoned my courage and asked then Dean Reese Hansen if he was disappointed in the number of women the Law School trains that do not end up practicing law. I tentatively waited for his answer. It came quickly and without hesitation. He said (and I'm paraphrasing), "Absolutely not. The Church believes in education, and the Law School is pleased with all their students regardless of their career decisions after law school." After his response I felt much more at ease.

I am a lawyer and feel confident that my training was not just a part of my past but also a part of my current and future life.

Other concerns I had were that my fellow women lawyers would look down upon me or think of me as a second-class citizen because of the choice I made not to practice. I haven't had the courage to ask them about this

directly. However, my unemotional guess would be that they were having the same concerns about me looking down upon them because of the choice they made to practice. It's funny how we sometimes seem to search for ways to demean or discourage ourselves, regardless of the choices we make.

The next hurdle I had to overcome was determining what Women in the Law could offer me that would be a big enough benefit to get me out of my day-

to-day role and activities. The thought came to me: one benefit would be to get me out of my day-to-day role and activities.

Another benefit of my involvement in Women in the Law would be for me to recognize that I am a lawyer and feel confident that my training was not just a part of my past but that it should also be a part of my current and future life. Elder Dallin Oaks made some very enlightening comments about this topic in an annual address to the Law Society in 2005. In his talk, entitled "The Beginning and the End of a Lawyer," he stated:

Most of us will conclude our formal activity in the legal profession before we die. But the skills and ways of thinking we have acquired as lawyers will remain—for better or for worse. And when properly applied, those skills and ways will still be a source of blessing to many.

For example, I am conscious every day that my approach to gathering facts, analyzing problems, and proposing action is a product of my legal training.¹

An additional benefit would be to get to know some women who were good lawyers with values similar to mine—lawyers I could then refer to friends. Several times a year someone asks me for legal help or a referral. It would be a great benefit to me to be able to give them some names of lawyers in whom I had confidence.

Yet another benefit to Women in the Law participation would be getting involved in some legal-related community service. Although I do not currently hold an active license to practice law, I feel strongly that my training and my experiences over the past 20 years at home could be of some benefit, or

to put it in Elder Oaks' words, "a source of blessing to many."²

After thinking about and sorting through all of the above, the most important reason to answer yes to the question posed in the title is this: God's plans are not for the short term. Let me explain. While at a Law Society presentation a few weeks ago, Bill Atkin stated to a group of LDS lawyers that there was a reason they went to law school and were lawyers. That comment rang true to me. There is a reason. For years I thought the reason was so that I could meet my husband, so that I could be involved with something demanding at a difficult time in my life, or so that I would have a good "insurance policy" if I ever needed to go to work. However, those reasons reflect only short-term thinking. God does not work that way. Everything He does interconnects and is interwoven for a purpose, for a reason. I know that I was supposed to attend the J. Reuben Clark Law School. God wanted me there. The short-term reasons are a part of the plan; but I do not think they are the entire plan. They are to be interwoven with my present and future. To quote Elder Oaks once again, "When properly applied, those skills and ways [learned in law school and in practice] will still be a source of blessing to many."³

I am not quite sure *how* I am supposed to be a "blessing to many," but I know that I am supposed to be, and I believe involvement in Women in the Law may be part of that plan.

Women in the Law. Does that mean me? Yes, it does.

NOTES

- 1 Elder Dallin H. Oaks, "The Beginning and the End of a Lawyer," *Clark Memorandum* (spring 2005): 2, 11.
- 2 *Id.*
- 3 *Id.*