

# Openness and Accomplishment

New State Bar  
President  
Helen Perry  
Grimwood



Smiling at those around her in a crowded hotel suite, Helen Perry Grimwood is the picture of the successful attorney on the threshold of yet another professional accomplishment. At this gathering—honoring retiring Arizona Supreme Court Justice Charles Jones—Grimwood is just days from assuming the mantle of President of the State Bar of Arizona. Yet her smile springs from a surprising source.

The heir apparent, of course, has myriad reasons to be pleased. Her career spanned two respected professions, her service to the improvement of lawyers' work is extensive, her commitment to causes and constituencies remarkable. Yet none of that brings the smile.

"I'd like you to meet my mother, Betty Perry," announces a beaming Grimwood to small circle after small circle.

The diminutive frame of Betty Perry is capped by her own broad smile, for she is proud of her daughter and happy to talk about her. "I just wish my husband could be here to see her," Mrs. Perry adds, speaking of David J. Perry, a Superior Court Judge for Maricopa County, who passed away in 1983.

But Helen Perry Grimwood will have none of it. At this Convention at which she assumes the Presidency, she wants to talk about her mother's accomplishments. Her eyes shine with pride as she describes how her mother served on the Maricopa County Bar Auxiliary, whose work once made events like this one possible. She also designed an education program titled "Respect for the Law," which served up to 14,000 sixth-graders for 15 years; the program required her to organize probation officers, volunteer lawyers and police every year. For good measure, she also was a teacher.

"That's the kind of Bar service I follow," says Grimwood later.

The new President's service includes organizations both local and national. She's held leadership positions in the State Bar of Arizona, the Maricopa County Bar Association, the National Conference of

Women's Bar Associations and the Arizona Women Lawyers Association.

Given those groups, it may come as no surprise that Grimwood has made diversity one of her goals.

Fellow State Bar Governor Diane Drain recalls her friend's early commitment to issues of parity.

"Helen decided to do a review of all of the major-size law firms in town and survey the women in upper management. And then she published the review. She was instrumental in making some of the firms aware of their own predispositions."

That 1997 survey, says Drain, took many law firms by surprise, and Grimwood's passion and enthusiasm continue: "That was the opening salvo in this live-wire energetic bombshell that just never stops."

Supreme Court Chief Staff Attorney Patience Huntwork has known Grimwood for years, and she foresees openness in the coming year.

"Helen appreciates inclusiveness and process that will permanently guarantee fairness, into the future and not just for today."

In fact, one of Grimwood's first official appearances as President-elect was at the statewide Minority Bar Convention. There, she was relaxed as she gathered with hundreds of people, many of whom she had known for years.

"The color of America is changing," Grimwood told those assembled. "There is no single culture that has a monopoly on happiness or truth. Our diversity will either pull us together or tear us apart."

The depth of her feeling was evident when she cast a critical eye even on the Board of Governors.

"There is very little diversity on the State Bar Board of Governors," said Grimwood. "It's concerning to me that I'm looking at a Board that has only two women lawyers. If you had told me 10 years ago that would be the case, I would have called you cynical."

She reminds listeners that an overtly discriminatory world existed not that long ago.

"I remember taking a business law class where one of the chapters was titled 'Infants, Idiots and Married Women.' It was a

required course. That was what I thought about whenever people would say the [Equal Rights Amendment] was not necessary."

Grimwood's own past includes being hired in 1973 as the first woman professional in Arthur Andersen's Phoenix office. There, the 20-year-old accountant was precluded from certain assignments because customers preferred a man. And her supervisor on the first day of the job took her to lunch for one reason: "to very angrily impress on me that women shouldn't be in the professions. They shouldn't be CPAs [because] they were taking men's jobs. He resented it."

Experiences like that, and a recognition that she sought to be an advocate rather than an accountant, led Grimwood to law school at Arizona State University. Even in law, however, she had discouraging encounters.

"When I was interviewing for second-year clerk positions," she recalls, "I'll never forget going to one of the major firms in town and having their litigation hiring partner tell me that he was glad that I wanted to

be on the corporate side—which at the time I did—because women couldn't possibly be litigators. This was in 1977."

"His comment didn't offend me personally, but one of my thoughts was, 'How could anybody be so stupid as to think that he could impress me by saying that?' He thought that his view was so obviously correct that he could articulate it to me, expecting me to agree on the basis that I at that time was going to be a corporate lawyer. I didn't go into [that] firm."

Instead, after clerkships with Judges L. Ray Haire at the Court of Appeals and William Canby Jr. at the Ninth Circuit, she joined Meyer Hendricks Victor Osborn & Maledon. There, she came to another important crossroads in the early 1980s, when she decided she had to be home full-time with her sons for a time.

"I decided that this was just a career-breaking decision," Grimwood says. "There was no precedent anywhere at any firm in town for giving any accommodation to an attorney in my circumstances. My experience during the '70s had been so negative that I had just resolved it in my mind that

**Helen Perry Grimwood** is a partner in the Phoenix law firm The Grimwood Law Firm plc. Her practice areas include commercial litigation, accountants and legal malpractice, financial fraud, insurance litigation and employment litigation.

**Education:** B.S., Business Administration, University of Arizona, *magna cum laude*, 1973; J.D., Arizona State University, *magna cum laude*, 1980

**Legal and Professional Experience:** State Bar Board of Governors, 1997–present; Maricopa County Bar Association, Director, 1992–96, Chair, Commercial Litigation CLE Committee, 1993–96; National Conference of Women's Bar Associations, Director, 1997–2004; Arizona Women Lawyers Association, President, 1996–97; American Bar Foundation, 2000–present; Judge *pro tem*, Court of Appeals, 1998; Judge *pro tem*, Superior Court for Maricopa County, 1993–present; Certified Public Accountant.

**Clerkships & Honors:** Law Clerk to Judge L. Ray Haire, Arizona Court of Appeals, 1980–81; Judge William C. Canby, Jr., U.S. Court of Appeals, Ninth Circuit, 1981–82. MCBA Friedman Award for Excellence in Legal Education, 1995; Justice Gordon Award for Pro Bono Service, 1996; AWLA Solin Award for Outstanding Leadership.

**Personal:** Husband N. Douglas Grimwood is her law partner; his practice includes labor and employment as well as workers' compensation law.

They have two sons, Eugene (Gene), 30, who is a fifth-grade teacher, and David, 26, who is a software consultant.

One of her brothers and her sister are both Arizona attorneys. Her other brother is a doctor.

this was a decision I needed to make, at high risk of it completely breaking my career.”

“I just told them I needed to quit, I needed to go home.”

To her surprise, though, the firm proposed another path.

“I’ll never forget David Victor saying, ‘You don’t need to do that, Helen. We don’t want you to quit. We want you to go do what you need to do, but we don’t want you to quit.’”

Grimwood took the time she needed. She later returned part-time, and then full-time. That took her out of the partnership track for a year or two, but she was not completely derailed; she was at the firm for 13 years, followed by six years with Osborn Maledon. Later, she opened her own small firm with her husband N. Douglas Grimwood, whose practice is in labor and employment law. At The Grimwood Law Firm plc, Helen Perry Grimwood carries on her commercial litigation practice.

Listening to Grimwood speak about diversity can be a bracing experience—and a somewhat askew one. “I always expected to be treated and advanced based on merit,” says Grimwood, highly accomplished in two major professions. “But somehow I just never quite figured out that that wasn’t how the world worked.” Her conversation is laced with comments like that, in which the woman of great experience is refracted through a lens of almost refreshing naivete. Perhaps the naive idealist is nothing less than the hard-as-nails realist—but of a reality that has yet to arrive. Until it does, though, Grimwood feels an obligation.

“It’s just been hugely difficult to move the center of the debate to where it is today. I hope it’s not just a tiny blip in 2,000 years of history. But I don’t assume it’s permanent; I assume somebody’s got to keep their foot in the door.”

“I don’t want to go to my grave and have people think, ‘There goes Helen. She was a great commercial litigator.’ That’s not enough for me.”



One issue that Grimwood has dedicated herself to for the past few years is the relocation of hundreds of Sudanese refugees into Arizona. They

emerged from a vicious civil war in which “schools in the southern Sudan were the direct target of the government,” says Grimwood. “The government destroyed the schools, killed the teachers and killed the principals or forced them out at gunpoint.”

“The targets of this government,” she continues, “were the churches and the schools and the teachers and the leaders. The women and the children were killed or enslaved. And the little boys had to run ... because they knew that they would be killed or be forced to be boy soldiers.”

Faced with the plight of almost 400 Sudanese refugees in the state, Grimwood and her church took a leadership role in helping them make a transition to a foreign land. Grimwood’s optimism carries through as she suggests, “If they’re called upon to reestablish the government of Sudan, they’ll be the ones who can help do it.”

To help them succeed, Grimwood and others in the church developed “culture workshops” on everything from how to clean an apartment, how to act in a job interview—and how to be safe if you’re about to be arrested. They then developed an education program in which the refugees apply for and take college courses. There also are tutoring, mentoring and study sessions.

Artwork by the refugees—often called The Lost Boys—line her office hallways. She seems in awe of them and their tragedy when she repeats what they have told her: “Education is my mother and my father.”

She mentions that there are 2.5 million Episcopalians in the United States—but twice that number in the Sudan. She could be revealing her thinking on any number of issues when she adds, “We sometimes think we’re where it is, but actually they’re where it is.”



Two qualities characterize Grimwood, say her colleagues: judgment born of accomplishment, and a lack of ego. Most people may be incapable of having both traits, but Grimwood is known for focusing on the task at hand, not for taking credit for whose hand stirred the pot.

Patience Huntwork at the Supreme Court expects great things from this presidency.

“Helen wants to be accountable for achievement; that for me is one of the rarest qualities of leadership.”

One person who knows Grimwood’s path is Roxie Bacon, the first woman to have been President of the State Bar (1991–92). And her acclaim is unequivocal.

“She will be fabulous. She has a great combination of vision and organizational skills. You don’t always get that in a person, in fact it’s usually one or the other. But with Helen, both that left- and right-brain thing are hitting on all eight cylinders.”

Judge Canby also agrees that “she’ll be a fine president.” He adds, “She’s very conscientious, a hard worker, very methodical.”

Methodical is a word many use in her description, but they point out that Grimwood’s focus on details can be deceiving.

Justice Andrew Hurwitz of the Arizona Supreme Court worked with Grimwood on “scores of matters” when they both were at Osborn Maledon. He compared first impression with later knowledge.

“People’s first reaction to Helen Grimwood would be, ‘Here’s a person who is a master of all these details.’ I think what they’ll find out by the end of the year is that that’s a tool by which she seeks larger goals. And they’ll be pleasantly surprised by how she achieves those goals.”

Judge Roxanne K. Song Ong of Phoenix Municipal Court met Grimwood when they were classmates at Central High School in Phoenix. And she also is struck more by the passionate activist than by the perfectionist.

“She’ll be phenomenal. She’s going to be president of the heart. She’ll lead with her heart. The nice thing about Helen is that she’ll bring a balance because she has been in the business field, [and] she has this wonderful way of dealing with others outside of her own law firm.”

Judge Canby adds, “On the surface, that [passion] doesn’t shine right away. It’s only when you dig in a little bit that you find that commitment.”

“It’s not all about Helen” is a phrase you hear often from her colleagues. Diane Drain says that, and she adds, “I can trust her basic

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personality that never allows her personal agenda to make something happen that shouldn't be happening. Helen has absolutely no personal agenda other than seeing a wrong she thinks needs right."

Huntwork puts it differently: "Helen is all substance. She refuses to set herself up as an important personage, because the task at hand is so important to her. She gives other people credit."

Bacon is sure that Grimwood's year will be issues-oriented.

"The agenda will be dominant, but she will not be dominant. She will not present herself as the poster [child]. She will let the issues drive her agenda."

Grimwood's commitment to issues, coupled with a mind accomplished at both cases and audits, can lead to a style that appears unrelenting—especially to those from whom she seeks answers. When she wants to understand an issue, whether at Board meetings or elsewhere, she wants to understand it completely. Once persuaded that her interlocutor is on the right track, however, she more fully trusts their judgment. The experience of being questioned by Grimwood can be unsettling, but what she seeks, say others, are answers and solutions, not a conversational "win."

Bacon agrees that Grimwood wants answers, not just responses.

"That's a major distinguishing factor between Helen and many other talented lawyers and leaders of the Bar: She really does rely on data. And that's cool, because data then drives the answers, rather than a particular bias or some personal history."

Asked to describe herself, Grimwood acknowledges that "I am relatively intense. I'm very analytical. I tend toward being a perfectionist, but I'm not a complete perfectionist."

"I'm a hard driver," she continues. "I have a very, very high energy level. I get a lot done. I move through things as quickly as I can consistent with it being a good process. I'm not somebody who would be comfortable as anything close to a rubber stamp on anything. [Members] elected people to the Board of Governors on the basis of their judgment, and they expect them to exercise that judgment."

But can it be difficult for others to get along with someone so hard-driving?

With a laugh and a smile, she replies, "I don't have any problem getting along with it."



Helen Perry Grimwood knows a lot about judicial integrity, and she speaks about it whenever given the opportunity. But before declaiming against the possibility of judicial elections, she recalls one noteworthy election in 1974.

It was the very last election before merit selection went into effect. There was a vacancy on the superior court. At that time, when the governor appointed an individual, that person would stand for election only if challenged. But challenges were rare. This particular case, Grimwood admits, "was a bit unusual."

Of course, it was David J. Perry, Grimwood's father, who had to stand for election in that primary. And it was the process, more than the outcome, that probably cemented in Grimwood's mind the importance of judicial integrity.

Perry was appointed to the superior court shortly before an election. He did not know he was about to be challenged in the primary by another Republican candidate who had not been appointed by the governor. Perry lost the election.

Grimwood hesitates when pressed to name the challenger who unseated her father, but she finally says, "It was Sandra O'Connor. She had been in the Legislature."

She actually had been the Majority Leader of the Senate since 1972. And beating that candidate would have been virtually impossible for anyone, incumbent or not.

That put Perry—and his family—in a difficult spot.

"My father [had] disbanded his practice," says Grimwood, "and only then found out he was going to be challenged by the President of the Senate. But the governor appointed him to the next opening, and he never missed a day on the bench, so very few people realized that he

had ever lost the primary.”

Grimwood’s father served on the superior court until he died.

From judicial elections other than her father’s, Grimwood recalls campaign advertising that was unseemly, and other incumbent judges losing their bench due to a single high-profile case—which the incumbents were prohibited from discussing in public. She recalls complex legal ideas “boiled down to slogans.”

Today’s attacks on the courts baffle the commercial lawyer in Grimwood.

“I’ve had clients from other parts of the country,” she says, “ask me before going into court whether I contributed to the judge’s judicial campaign. When I tell them, ‘No, we have merit selection, we don’t have to worry about that,’ they can hardly believe it’s true. They’re relieved.”

“Our merit selection system is something that means more to business clients and individual clients than anyone can imagine until they’ve actually been part of the process. In my 25 years of practice, I have never met a client who doesn’t want a totally independent judge.”

“They want to have a level playing field, and that’s what judicial independence gives them. Merit selection is the epitome of that.”

To combat the attacks on something Grimwood calls “part of the backbone of our democracy,” she advocates “a full-court press” to inform the public about a system “recognized throughout the country as being one of the best systems that we’ve got.”

Perhaps for Grimwood, merit selection is best seen as the triumph of open process. When she champions diversity, she feels she is praising merit selection of the highest order. For in so doing, she proclaims her distaste for backroom deals and prejudices that keep participants out, her disdain for a system in which ideas are trumped by stereotypes and slogans.

The coming year will reveal whether the legal process—in and out of courtrooms—grows more open or more political. But Grimwood, for one, has promised a full-court press. 