

THE DAILY RECORD

WESTERN NEW YORK'S SOURCE FOR LAW, REAL ESTATE, FINANCE AND GENERAL INTELLIGENCE SINCE 1908

GRAWA PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Just how far have we come?

My grandmother, Grace, was a brilliant woman.

Everyone who knew her likely would agree with that statement. Even as a young child, she was, as they say, "scary smart" and was advanced not one but two grades in elementary school in order to provide her with sufficient academic stimulation.

Not surprisingly, Grace graduated from high school as her class valedictorian with all the hope and promise naturally attached to a person with such status.

She was honored with a full scholarship to a college out of state where she could study library science. Grace was a lover of books and learning. Surrounding herself with those things in a career as a librarian was, in her view, the perfect melding of her talent and passion. When she was little, it was the librarians in her little community who immediately recognized my grandmother's unquenchable thirst for knowledge and gave her stacks of all kinds of books to keep her engaged and enthralled.

Yet, when it actually came time for my grandmother to leave for college, her mother broke the news that the family did not have enough money to transport her there. Despite the generous scholarship, she still would have to cover such things as travel, books, clothing, meals and school supplies, and her family simply didn't have it. It was the height of the Great Depression and she, like many others, lived in a family of extremely limited means in her small Pennsylvania town.

Moreover, my grandmother was the daughter in a family that also had a son. The family made what I expect was a desperate and heart-wrenching decision to preserve the limited financial resources for her brother's education. It was their thinking that the brother would need to support a family someday, while Grace likely would marry and eventually focus her energies on child-rearing rather than a career.

Understanding that my grandmother craved, and deserved, some higher education, my great-grandmother learned the local hospital ran a nursing school for women and students there were guaranteed a nursing degree, dormitory housing, three proper meals a day, and a steady job after graduation. Doubtless, "three squares" and a potential job was nothing to scoff at during that time. Nursing was a respectable and challenging enough career, but it also was a helping profession to which women were relegated disproportionately.

My grandmother did not want to be a nurse. Despite her con-

tinuing protests, it was decided. Grace was packed into the family car and driven to the local nursing school. She wept all the way there.

After parking in front of the school, my great-grandmother kindly, but firmly, told Grace she could exit the car and begin her new life once she stopped crying. Grace sobbed in the car for more than three hours — and then she went in.

Grace was an excellent and conscientious nurse. She met and married my grandfather shortly after graduating from nursing school. He was a dairy farmer and, while he generally had a job, money always was tight. Three children came and, despite the predictions of her parents, Grace often was the family's primary and most stable breadwinner. Putting family first, there never was enough time or money to pursue her deferred educational dream.

As Grace's own children grew up, their educations became the financial priority. After that, she even helped to educate her grandchildren — myself included. Grace retired from nursing in her early 80s. She continued to love libraries and supported them in her own way as a frequent customer and volunteer. My grandmother also remained an avid collector of books and, when she passed seven years ago, my mother and uncles spent days sorting through her accumulated stacks of classic novels, biographies, travelogues and dime store paperbacks.

Grace told me the story of how she became a nurse when I was in law school. At that time, she was in her late 80s. Even then, her sadness was tempered by time and life experience, but the regret remained palpable. She was so proud I had choices that were not limited by my gender. She was equally intrigued to discover that nearly half of my law school class was female. Frankly, with her quick wit, fierce attitude, and charming storytelling abilities, Grace would have made a superb lawyer.

I was reminded of my grandmother recently and this part of her rich life story upon reading "The Shriver Report: A Study by Maria Shriver and the Center for American Progress," available online at: www.awomansnation.com. This unique study examined academic research, anecdotal evidence, personal reflections and poll results to confirm and report on modern American women and their place in the nation as workers, family members, spiritual beings and media-based role models. The report is



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utterly fascinating, both for women and men, and I encourage readers to take even a cursory look.

At its most basic level, the report contends so many women in today's workforce changes everything, undeniably impacting how we all live, work, play, care for each other and care for our families. The report was intended to lay the groundwork for a national conversation around these issues, and attract the attention of the policymakers and lawmakers who have to appropriately respond to this fundamental societal transformation.

The report states that women now comprise half of all U.S. workers, and mothers are now the primary breadwinners and co-breadwinners in two-thirds of American families. That's quite a dramatic shift from 1967, when women made up only a third of all workers.

As more and more women took on the role of breadwinner, either for themselves or for their families, many looked to education as the link to better opportunities and a larger paycheck. Today, women receive 62 percent of college associate's degrees, 57 percent of bachelor's degrees, 60 percent of master's degrees and about 50 percent of all professional degrees and Ph.D.s. Gender parity in such graduate and professional degrees is particularly remarkable given that in 1966 less than 10 percent of American women received degrees in law and medicine.

Great news for women in the law? These numbers are promis-

ing, but not fully representative of gender parity in the legal profession. According to the ABA Commission on Women in the Profession's 2008 report, women comprise only 31.6 percent in the profession. Of women in private practice, a mere 18.3 percent become partners while 45.1 percent work as associates. Female general counsel in Fortune 500 corporations comprise only 18.4 percent and, of those, more than 90 percent are Caucasians.

Per the U.S. Bureau of Labor statistics, women lawyers' weekly salaries in 2006 averaged only 77.5 percent of male lawyers. The Oct. 26 National Survey from the National Association of Women Lawyers confirms those findings, and underscores that women are significantly under-represented in the upper levels of law firms, the large majority of women who start as associates in firms do not advance to equity partnership and even fewer become law firm leaders. The survey also found, alarmingly, that women lawyers working part-time are being terminated disproportionately during the current economic downturn.

So, Grace, today's women actually have a better chance of becoming lawyers, doctors and librarians, ... but there is still much work to do.

Amy Schwartz is the 27th president of the Greater Rochester Association for Women Attorneys and a senior staff attorney with Empire Justice Center, where she directs the organization's Domestic Violence Legal Project.