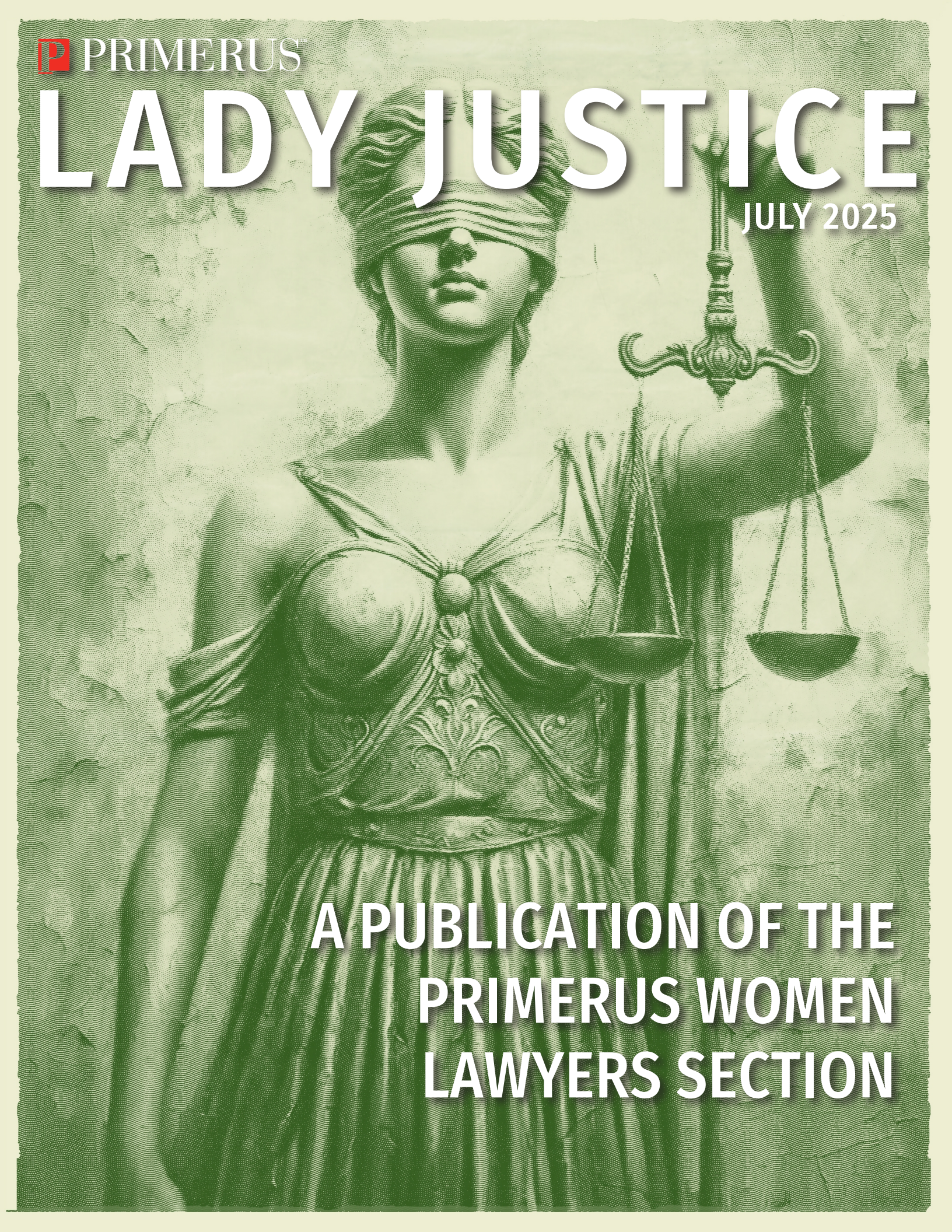


 PRIMERUS

# LADY JUSTICE

JULY 2025



A PUBLICATION OF THE  
PRIMERUS WOMEN  
LAWYERS SECTION



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# CHAIR COLUMN




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Melissa L. Demorest LeDuc focuses her practice on commercial real estate and business transactions at Demorest Law Firm, PLLC. Her commercial real estate practice includes sales and acquisitions of multifamily housing, hotels, shopping centers, and other commercial properties, as well as leasing. She also handles business mergers and acquisitions, contracts, and other business transactions. She serves as outside general counsel for many small businesses, providing guidance in employment, real estate, contracts, business formation, and other business matters.

Welcome to our summer 2025 issue of Lady Justice. Growing up as the oldest of five kids, I often had to act as the peacemaker for my younger siblings. Learning that skill at an early age has helped me in navigating conflicts and overcoming obstacles with opposing counsel and with clients. I try to find common ground, whether negotiating a deal, resolving a dispute, or building a relationship.

In this issue, Primerus women lawyers give us a glimpse into their experiences bridging the divide and navigating differences in their work and life experiences. As women lawyers, we truly make a difference in this area. It is particularly important to work towards finding common ground and bridging divides in these uncertain times.

Please join us for our upcoming networking calls on September 9 and November 11, and, of course, at the [Global Conference](#) in October. We look forward to connecting with you. 

# WOMEN LAWYERS SECTION UPDATES

**WLS Networking Call**

September 9, 2025 at 1:30 PM EDT  
November 11, 2025 at 1:30 PM EST

**WLS Primerus Contact**

Bre Judkins – [bjudkins@primerus.com](mailto:bjudkins@primerus.com)







# MEET THE MEMBER



**RACHELLE L. MILLER**  
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Rachelle L. Miller, of Cardelli Lanfear Law, is a recently admitted associate with experience in first and third-party no-fault claims and premises liability claims. During law school, Rachelle gained procedural experience while clerking for a federal judge. Additionally, she has had firsthand experience handling claims in Federal District Court through her position at Michigan’s first federal pro se legal assistance clinic established in the Eastern District Court of Michigan by University of Detroit Mercy School of Law.

**WHAT YEAR DID YOU START PRACTICING LAW?**

I started practicing in November 2019, just months before the COVID-19 pandemic shut down all in-person litigation.

**WHERE DO YOU PRACTICE LAW?**

Cardelli Lanfear Law, Troy, Michigan, U.S.

**WHAT IS THE FOCUS OF YOUR PRACTICE?**

My focus is on insurance defense, working on no-fault litigation first- and third-party, dog bites, consumer litigation, and some business litigation.

**WHY DID YOU BECOME A LAWYER AND HAS THE LAW MET YOUR EXPECTATIONS?**

I took a unique path to the law. Growing up, my focus was on STEM, and I intended to become a doctor. About three-quarters of the way through my undergraduate degree, I realized I hated the path that I was on, and I refocused from chemistry to political science.

I am a first-generation lawyer, so I did not have any expectations when it came to the legal field. I will say that law school did not prepare me for what I thought my day-to-day was going to be, but I believe I found my niche in litigation, as I am very deadline-driven.

**WHAT IS ONE PIECE OF ADVICE YOU WISH SOMEONE WOULD HAVE GIVEN YOU PRIOR TO STARTING THE PRACTICE OF LAW?**

Work in a law firm before graduating from law school, or better yet, before attending law school.

**WHAT IS THE BEST ADVICE YOU HAVE RECEIVED SINCE STARTING PRACTICE?**

My legal assistant’s favorite advice is to be a duck and let it (i.e., stress) roll off your shoulders. While sometimes the stress is hard not to internalize, she always reminds me there will be a different high and low tomorrow.

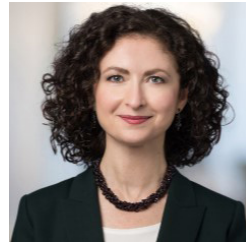
“Be curious” – I really think this idea drives the investigation needed on the defense side. Always ask the why.

**WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE THING TO DO OUTSIDE OF WORK?**

I have two favorite things to do outside of work which coincide with each other. I love music festivals and I love to travel. I have been to over 20 music festivals spanning all over the country from Coachella and Bonnaroo, to Boston Calling. I love all music types, so I have attended rap/hip-hop all the way to country music festivals with my husband. Music and travel are our true passions, and we try to fit them in as often as possible. **P**



# BREAKING BREAD, BUILDING TRUST



## KARINA B. STERMAN

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A creative and ardent advocate for her clients, Karina B. Sterman defends businesses in class action lawsuits as well as in discrimination, retaliation, wrongful termination, and other employment disputes. While she regularly defends companies in administrative proceedings in front of the EEOC, Department of Labor, California Labor Commissioner, and other jurisdictions, she leverages her significant experience in “behind the scenes” counseling to avoid or resolve pending claims.

A partner in both the Litigation and Employment Law Departments at Greenberg Glusker, Karina counsels her clients on wage and hour and other employment law compliance, drafting employment-related documents, and participating in a business-minded employment strategy to minimize the risks of litigation and costly long-term mistakes. She regularly provides employment law training, performs HR legal audits, and builds trade secret protection plans to maximize the value of her clients’ investment in their intellectual property.

In addition to being a published author and frequent guest speaker on employment law and intellectual property matters, Karina is proud to maintain a Martindale-Hubbell peer review rating of AV Preeminent. She is also honored to have been recognized by her peers for many years on the Southern California Super Lawyers list.

In one of my most memorable cases, I served as lead counsel in a complex intellectual property dispute involving eight defendants and millions of dollars at stake. We were ordered into an early “mandatory mediation,” but it quickly devolved into a cycle of posturing, with each side convinced they would prevail at trial. The litigation intensified with depositions, subpoenas, and endless documents, until one day, my client turned to me and just said, “Settle this.” That was the moment I’d been waiting for – I knew it was time to take a different approach.

It became clear to me that before we could talk about settlement, we needed to rebuild trust. I’d learned that, unbeknownst to the lawyers

involved, the clients had been trying to resolve things behind the scenes, only to further damage their relationship. So, I took a step back and decided we needed to strip away the legal armor. I invited everyone to lunch in a neutral setting – no talk about the case, no threats, no posturing. I even let them pick the place and assured them I was buying. I circulated ground rules that both sides agreed to, and, surprisingly, I was told that the only reason the opposing party agreed to come was because I’d be there – they said I was the only “civilized” attorney at the table.

My client was skeptical, but I had a feeling the lunch would shift the energy. And it did. Not long

after, I got a thank-you note from opposing counsel, followed by a real settlement offer. That was the turning point. We were able to keep the dialogue going and settle the case within two weeks – something that had seemed impossible. While I do love a good trial, this experience reminded me that most litigation is about people, not just legal issues. I’ve always believed that when you treat people with dignity and allow them to preserve their pride, even in conflict, resolution becomes possible. And while I don’t know if being the only woman in the room made a difference, others said it helped. I like to think they were right. **P**





# DEALING WITH DIFFICULT OPPOSING COUNSEL: STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS



**SADA BÂBY**  
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Sada Bâby is a litigation partner at Krevolin Horst representing both plaintiffs and defendants in a variety of business-related disputes. Her practice focuses on matters involving business divorces, shareholder and LLC member disputes, restrictive covenants, employment disputes, insurance coverage, professional liability, defense of premises liability suits, and complex contractual interpretation and business torts. She also has experience in alternative dispute resolution, including arbitration and mediation.

Before her career as an attorney, Sada was a professional athlete on the United States National Fencing Team. She competed in the 2004 and 2008 Olympic Games, earning three medals, and was the first American woman to achieve a #1 world ranking in fencing. Sada has also been inducted into both the International Fencing Federation and USA Fencing Hall of Fame.

**JESSICA GABEL CINO**  
[cino@khlawfirm.com](mailto:cino@khlawfirm.com)



Jessica “Jess” Cino is a litigation partner at Krevolin Horst and an experienced litigator who strategically guides clients through complex business crises including litigation, investigations, fraud and financial misconduct, cybercrimes, RICO claims, and insolvency. Jess specializes in high-stakes civil and criminal litigation matters by capitalizing on her extensive experience to serve clients across all industries, economic sectors, and jurisdictions. She leads high-profile investigations, corporate investigations, internal investigations, government investigations, higher education investigations, and Title IX investigations.

Before joining Krevolin Horst, Jess was a tenured, full professor at Georgia State University College of Law, teaching courses on evidence, contracts, bankruptcy, and scientific evidence. Jess also served as the academic dean of GSU Law.

In litigation, encountering difficult opposing counsel is almost inevitable. While some challenges come from overt aggression – shouting, personal attacks, or bullying – others are more subtle, but just as disruptive. Successfully navigating these behaviors requires a blend of professionalism, strategic thinking, and emotional intelligence.

## Understanding and Responding to Common Types of Difficult Counsel

### THE BULLY

These lawyers rely on intimidation – raising their voice, making derogatory remarks, or exploiting perceived power imbalances. They often target younger or less experienced attorneys. Reason and resolution go out the window as they bulldoze through cases with aggression over strategy.

**Response strategy:** Always keep your cool and be professional. Never stoop to personal attacks or rudeness, even if opposing counsel tries to provoke it. Remember, the words you write in an email could be read by a judge one day. That said, professionalism doesn’t mean passivity. If opposing counsel is being abusive over the phone, it is perfectly acceptable to politely but firmly end the call with

an offer to resume the conversation once emotions have cooled, or via email. The key is to remain composed. Bullies lose their edge when they can’t provoke a reaction.

### THE OVERZEALOUS FILER

This lawyer bombards the court with excessive, often frivolous motions – not to win on merit, but to overwhelm, delay, and drive up costs.

**Response strategy:** Be selective and strategic in your responses. Don’t take the bait on every motion. Excessive, lengthy counter filings can exhaust your client’s resources and may reflect poorly on both sides. Instead, explore procedural tools that can make defending against a heavy motions practice more efficient. Many courts allow disputes to be raised informally through conference calls or short letter briefs. In complex cases, consider requesting a special master to manage the flood of motions and keep the case on track.

### THE ENABLER

These attorneys are effectively along for the ride, unable or unwilling to rein in difficult clients who have unrealistic expectations, unchecked emotions, or who regularly fuel conflict.

**Response strategy:** Consider proposing mediation. Skilled mediators do more than facilitate settlement, they help parties understand the strengths and weaknesses of their case and the true costs of litigation. If opposing counsel can’t manage their client, a respected mediator may be able to restore balance and move your case forward.

### THE GHOST

This lawyer misses deadlines, ignores emails, and creates chaos through delay and failure to communicate. This often causes unnecessary emergencies and confusion for even the most diligent of lawyers.

**Response strategy:** Stay in control of your case. If opposing counsel won’t respond to your emails, pick up the phone and call. If it still feels like they’re ignoring you or trying to run out the clock, set firm, reasonable deadlines and be prepared to involve the court if progress stalls. Don’t wait for a crisis situation or assume the court will extend case deadlines, even if you didn’t create the delay.

### THE CHEATER

Some lawyers just don’t play by the rules. Whether it’s ignoring a judge’s standing order, skirting the rules of professional conduct, backtracking on





verbal agreements, or denying prior conversations, these lawyers take unfair advantage of the system and their opponents.

**Response strategy:** Protect yourself and your client while maintaining your integrity. Consistency and written records are your best defenses. Follow up verbal communications with a clear, concise summary email. Document misconduct and raise concerns early – not as personal attacks, but framed as process-based concerns: fairness, efficiency, and respect for the court’s authority. If the misconduct is serious or repeated, consider seeking sanctions, but only after establishing a clear record and giving advance notice where appropriate. For egregious violations, you may need to report the conduct to the appropriate state bar or disciplinary body. This is especially important if the misconduct harms clients or the integrity of the profession.

**THE PRETENDER**  
Some lawyers just don’t know the rules and don’t bother to learn them. Whether it’s filing half-baked motions, fumbling through court appearances, or missing key deadlines, these lawyers operate out of their depth. They often create more work – not just for opposing counsel, but for the court – leading to delays, confusion, and avoidable messes that derail progress and cost clients time and money.

**Response strategy:** Prioritize clarity and accountability. Keep communications concise and in writing to minimize confusion and create a record. Be proactive in identifying gaps in their competence – especially when they slow the legal process or create risk to your client. Raise issues professionally, but firmly, when their lack of preparedness

affects timelines or accuracy. Where the incompetence causes material harm or persistent inefficiencies, document thoroughly and consider court involvement – including motions to compel or for sanctions, if warranted.

**Proactive Approaches for Managing Difficult Opposing Counsel**

Dealing with difficult counsel isn’t only about reacting, you can often prevent conflict or lessen its impact by being proactive.

- **Set the Tone Early and Extend Professional Courtesies:** From your first interaction, model professionalism and clarity. Establishing boundaries and expectations up front can prevent miscommunication and make it harder for opposing counsel to justify bad behavior later. It might seem counterintuitive, but offering small professional courtesies – like brief extensions or schedule accommodations – can disarm difficult counsel. It also builds your credibility with the court. Always exercise your own judgment on these matters, don’t let your client or others involved dictate what courtesy looks like.

- **Know the Judge’s Preferences:** Many judges have detailed standing orders that address dispute resolution procedures. Familiarize yourself with these tools. They often contain options for informal resolution that can prevent long delays or unnecessary motion practice.
- **Build and Protect Your Reputation:** In a profession built on trust, your reputation matters. Be the attorney who is known for responsiveness, reliability, and professionalism. Not every slight deserves a response. Choose your points of contention wisely and avoid taking the bait on minor provocations. Judges and opposing counsel alike notice who brings calm to chaos – and your client will benefit from your solid reputation.

Difficult opposing counsel are a fact of life in litigation, but they don’t have to derail your case. By understanding the common types and staying strategic, composed, and professional, you can neutralize bad behavior while staying focused on what truly matters: advocating effectively for your client. In the long run, your integrity and reputation are your greatest assets in the courtroom and beyond. **P**



# FINDING COMMON GROUND: A JOURNEY THROUGH GENDER, CULTURE, AND THE COURTROOM



**ELENA MAMAY**  
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Elena Mamay is a litigator at Mann Lawyers LLP in Ottawa, Canada, where she focuses on complex civil and commercial litigation, as well as estates and trusts disputes and alternative dispute resolution. Her legal education began at Suffolk Law School in Boston and continued at Georgetown Law Center in Washington, D.C., giving her a strong academic foundation for a diverse legal career. Following her studies, Elena practiced law in Boston before moving to Europe, where she prosecuted high-profile cases involving war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide.

She now guides clients through the intricate challenges of litigation, adeptly navigating complex legal issues and offering strategic solutions. Her commitment to promoting access to justice is reflected in her work with Legal Aid Ontario. In 2023, Elena completed an intensive training program at Harvard Law School, specializing in conflict resolution, mediation, and arbitration. She is currently developing a practice that incorporates these skills to provide clients with a more effective, cost-efficient, and non-confrontational approach to dispute resolution.

When I began my legal career in the early 2000s, I stood out for many reasons, though not always in ways that felt empowering. I was a young, female, international student from Uzbekistan, trying to find my footing in Boston, at Palmer & Dodge LLP (now Troutman Pepper Locke LLP), a firm known for its prestige, tradition, and deeply rooted elitism. I carried with me a strong accent, an unfamiliar name, and the layered, often disorienting identity of someone straddling multiple cultures. Beneath all of that was the quiet, persistent uncertainty of someone who wasn’t entirely sure she belonged.

But alongside that uncertainty, I also carried grit, a relentless determination mixed, admittedly, with an unhealthy dose of stubbornness, and a deep desire to prove myself. What made the difference, however, was the support I received, both personally and professionally.

In my personal life, I had the extraordinary fortune of meeting Ronald and Rosemary Bettencourt, a warm and generous couple from Taunton, Massachusetts. Though they had no children of their own, they welcomed me into their family with open arms, introducing me to others as their “long-lost Uzbeki daughter.”

They became my parents in every way that mattered: my foundation, my compass, my world. They taught me about American culture, explained the rules of baseball and football, supported my academic and professional dreams, and never once doubted my ability to reach for the stars. They stood by me when my confidence faltered and beamed with pride as I walked across the stage at my law school graduation. Their belief in me became an anchor – steady, quiet, and transformative. I still carry it with me.



Professionally, I was equally fortunate to find a mentor in Sarah Richards (now at Nixon Peabody LLP), a brilliant and compassionate lawyer who chose to see beyond the surface and past all our differences. She looked past my accent, my cultural missteps, and my awkward jokes lifted from sitcoms I watched in an effort to master the language. Sarah saw my drive, my discipline, and my desire to do meaningful work. She didn't just guide me; she grounded me. She offered her belief in me at a time when I was still struggling to believe in myself. She taught me that success didn't require a pedigree, and that competence, paired with integrity and persistence, could cut through bias and speak louder than assumptions. Through her example, I learned that leadership often comes not from commanding a room, but from empowering someone else to walk into it with confidence.

After Palmer & Dodge, my next professional chapter brought me to the international war crimes tribunal in Europe, where I served as an international legal adviser in the Trial and later the Appellate Chamber. I worked on some of the most harrowing cases in my legal career, cases involving war crimes, genocide, and crimes against humanity committed during the Yugoslavian conflict. It was an intense, high-stakes environment shaped by political complexity, legal nuance, and

overwhelming human tragedy. It was also, unsurprisingly, a deeply male-dominated space.

And yet, amidst that landscape, I had the immense privilege of working alongside two remarkable women: Judge Marie Tuma from Sweden and Judge Elizabeth Fahey from Boston, Massachusetts. These women didn't just lead, they empowered. They trusted my knowledge and judgment, invited me into high-level deliberations, and advanced my recommendations when warranted. In doing so, they didn't just acknowledge my voice, they amplified it in rooms where few expected to hear it. They didn't merely open doors for me; they held them open and stood beside me as I walked through.

There were many long days and nights when we sat together, grappling with fragile evidence, the weight of legal responsibility, bureaucratic tensions, and the delicate dynamics of cultural and ethnic differences within a multinational institution. In those moments, I witnessed their unwavering commitment to fairness, due process, and truth-finding. They refused to cut corners, even under pressure, and treated every contribution, regardless of its source, with respect.

Through their example, I learned that the path to justice is not only paved with law, but with integrity, patience,

and trust. I also learned that when diverse perspectives are met with mutual respect, cultural differences become a strength rather than a barrier. They showed me that we grow not by erasing our differences, but by embracing them and learning from them.

When I moved to Canada in 2010, I once again found myself in unfamiliar territory. This time, the courtroom was not in The Hague but in a new country, with new norms, new dynamics, and yet the same familiar message: that I didn't quite belong. Sometimes it was subtle, sometimes painfully overt. I was a woman. I had the wrong accent (one that didn't come from the UK, Australia, or white South Africa) and I lacked a professional network and client portfolio. In countless ways, both spoken and unspoken, I was reminded that I was an outsider.

I found myself constantly having to prove that my accent was not a deficit, and that my cultural background did not diminish my competence. I had to defend the idea that the way I spoke had nothing to do with what I knew and my level of competence. My knowledge, experience, and legal reasoning didn't have an accent but all too often, I had to work twice as hard to be taken seriously. Comments equating my accent with incompetence or worse, likening it to a disability were frequent, cutting, and demoralizing.

Still, I stayed the course. I held on to the lessons Sarah, Marie, and Elizabeth taught me: that integrity, grit, and belief in one's own voice can cut through even the deepest doubt. One of the most transformative experiences of my career came when I worked on a class action lawsuit involving systemic sexual harassment within the Waterloo, Ontario police force. I had the privilege of representing courageous female officers who stood up to a toxic, male-dominated culture, one that, sadly, remains all too familiar and well-documented in Canada.

These women's bravery touched something deep in me. I often questioned whether I was the right person to carry such a heavy responsibility. But during those moments of doubt, I was uplifted by the strong support of my colleagues, especially Matthew Moloci at Scarfone Hawkins LLP in Hamilton, Ontario, and Colleen Yamashita, now a judge of the Superior Court of Justice in Hamilton. They pushed me intellectually, challenged my assumptions, and helped stretch the limits of my own resilience. Together, we spent countless hours combing through evidence, preparing witnesses, and drafting submissions, work that took us from the Superior Court of Justice all the way to the Supreme Court of Canada.

In the middle of one appeal, I was unexpectedly hospitalized for ten days. Without hesitation, Matthew and Colleen took on my share of the workload, ensuring I had time to recover. Their kindness and commitment reminded me that solidarity is not just about shared identity, it's about shared values and collective purpose. For the first time in a long time, I felt I truly belonged, not because I had changed, but because I was seen. And in that space



of mutual trust and respect, I began to believe that my voice, no matter how quiet or accented, mattered.

I now practice at Mann Lawyers LLP, in Ottawa, Canada, where I've found not just a workplace, but a family, a community. I am part of a team that truly understands what it means to support one another, not despite our differences, but because of them. Here, our diversity of backgrounds, perspectives, and lived experiences aren't just accommodated, they are a part of what makes us strong.

During my interview with the firm, I was asked a question I've been asked many times throughout my career: "What has been the biggest challenge you've faced, and how did you overcome it?" I paused before answering. Then I told them, quite honestly, that my biggest challenge has always been being treated like a book. Not surprisingly, I was met with puzzled expressions. I explained that most people judge a book by its cover. Many believe what the critics say about the content and quality of the story. Some will skim the first few pages before drawing conclusions. But very few will read the entire book with an open mind. My lifelong

challenge has been to convince people to be those rare few, to resist the urge to dismiss based on accent, appearance, or background, and to instead dare to read my story in full. That challenge, I told them, has also become my strength.

With over two decades of litigation experience across different continents and courtrooms, I've had the opportunity to stand shoulder-to-shoulder, and sometimes toe-to-toe, with strong-willed, highly driven litigation counsel. And while I can't possibly name every person who has shaped my path, I hold deep gratitude for those who created space, showed grace, and reminded me in times of hardships that real growth almost always begins with discomfort.

Being an immigrant woman in a male-dominated litigation world is not only about breaking barriers, it is also about building bridges. It means learning to navigate systems that weren't built for people like me. It means learning how to translate not only language, but culture, nuance, and expectation. And it means forging connections and finding common ground, even in spaces designed to make you feel like an outsider.





But in those moments of doubt or alienation, I've returned again and again to one truth: While our differences can be daunting, they can also be our greatest strength. They expand our lens. They deepen our empathy. They teach us how to listen, advocate, and lead with empathy and courage.

This profession has demanded much of me, more than I could ever imagine when I began my journey. But it has also given me extraordinary gifts, the opportunity to grow, to serve, to lead, and to give back. My hope in sharing my journey is to offer something to those who still feel like they don't belong, because of their accent, their background, their gender, or simply because they don't fit someone else's mold.

They do belong. Their voice matters. Excellence does not come with a single accent, appearance, or pedigree. And leadership? True leadership doesn't come with a title or a corner office. Sometimes it looks like the quiet, unwavering belief in someone who's still learning to believe in themselves. If you've had someone do that for you, you know how powerful it is. If you haven't yet, I hope this story serves as a reminder: you are worth seeing, worth hearing, and worth the read. **P**

YOUR  
OPINION  
MATTERS







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