

The Catalyst

The newsletter of the Illinois State Bar Association's Standing Committee on Women and the Law

Getting to Know: An Interview With Gladys Santana

BY MARGIE KOMES PUTZLER

I had the opportunity to interview Gladys Santana, a new member of the Standing Committee of Women and the Law. She works at Meyers & Flowers, LLC, and has since its inception in 2013. Meyers & Flowers, LLC has its primary office in St. Charles, Illinois, and offices in downtown Chicago and Peru, Illinois, representing clients all over the country. Prior to that Gladys worked at Foote, Meyers, Mielke, Flowers, LLC first as an intern, and then as an associate. She currently represents people who have been injured with a focus on representing people who have been hurt by defective medical devices or dangerous pharmaceutical drugs. She is passionate about helping people who have been wronged and finds work to be most rewarding when she is able to help a person or family achieve some semblance of justice, help guide them through what can feel like darkness, and help find peace in the answers to their questions.

Gladys grew up in West Chicago and attended Northern Illinois University for undergrad where she majored in political science and minored in English. She said she loved Dekalb's sea of corn fields so much (insert laugh here!) that she chose to attend Northern Illinois University College of Law for her legal studies. Since she was a small child, Gladys knew she wanted to help people. Initially she wanted to be a police officer but since she inherited her mother's

small stature, she decided law was a better fit.

Gladys told me her career has been influenced by so many people, some good, some not so good. A career in the legal field is dynamic and ever changing, influenced by people from all walks of life. But, pressed for an answer, she shared that one person who has influenced her career, in more ways than even he may know, is one of the first attorneys she met shortly after becoming a lawyer, Ryan Theriault. She has known him for almost 10 years now, during which time he has served as her mentor, even if he did not intend to. He is a talented lawyer who is ambitious, witty, funny, honest, and generous with his time, which is a most valuable commodity in the legal field (and in life!). Having been a first-generation attorney who came from a working immigrant family, Gladys did not have the luxury of family or friends who were lawyers to teach her the ropes. She had Ryan. He taught her practical skills, opened her eyes to opportunities she did not know existed and has allowed her to share in his triumphs and successes. She said that Ryan Theriault has undoubtedly impacted the trajectory of her career and has pushed her to be a better lawyer.

I asked Gladys who she considered the most influential woman in her life. She was quick to respond that it may sound like a cliché but the single most influential woman

in her life, without a doubt, is her mother, Irma Proa. She has influenced Gladys to be a strong, independent, leader and is a source of strength and inspiration, not just for Gladys, but for the entire family. Even with her mother's small five-foot frame, she has managed to defy stereotypes, break barriers, build and re-build multiple, successful businesses from scratch, and carve out opportunities for herself and her family. She exudes confidence that she does not even know she has and is capable of commanding a room full of adversaries all while keeping composure and grace. Her contagious optimism, vigor for life and unwavering enthusiasm for her family is unlike any other. Gladys said when she grows up, she wants to be like her.

Gladys joined the ISBA as a newly admitted lawyer because that was the organization in which other attorneys in her firm were members. The ISBA had the added benefit of offering a newly admitted CLE package that all lawyers need in the first year of practice. The ISBA offers so many great CLE opportunities.

When asked if she had any tips for our new attorneys Gladys responded with "jump in, headfirst, into expanding your network. When you graduate law school, you quickly realize that law school taught you how to *think* like a lawyer but did not actually teach you how to *be* a lawyer. As a result, in the first few months and years

of being admitted to practice law, new attorneys tend to focus on learning their area of practice and tend to forget about the importance of networking. Get out, talk to people, meet other lawyers, make connections. Hard work alone is not enough to make you excel as a lawyer. Consistently working on expanding your network is key and you will be a better lawyer because of it.” She explained that this is done by following up with the connections you make. When you are at a networking event like a golf outing or conference, you will meet a lot of people in a short period of time. It is easy to meet people for the first time in these types of settings, but it is much harder to cultivate meaningful connections from those single conversations. If you build off your initial encounter, you will find that the short conversations can turn into fruitful professional connections. For example, if you learn a tidbit or anecdotal fact about a person, follow up the conversation by

bringing it up in an email a week or two after your initial meeting. People appreciate being heard and remembered.

Women face many obstacles in the legal profession. I asked Gladys what she thought was the biggest obstacle. She pointed out there are so many, sometimes it’s exhausting. In her opinion, the biggest obstacle for women is, simply put, inequality: unequal pay, unequal opportunities, unequal expectations. There are many misconceptions that are attached to an attorney simply by being a woman in the legal field. While women cannot allow those misconceptions to govern how we practice law, dispelling them can certainly be an intentional byproduct of all the amazing work accomplished as trailblazing women lawyers.

Gladys comes from a Mexican family and her leisure time is filled with family and food. Her tight knit family is everything to her and food is central to her happiness.

More often than not, you will find Gladys firing up the grill for a carne asada with her husband, three kids, parents, siblings, nieces, nephews, friends, etc. Large gatherings with tons of food are common in her house. She admitted, and claims her family will attest to it, that she is probably the worst cook in her family but, in her defense, the standards are very high as her parents have owned several Mexican restaurants in their lifetime—how can she compete with that? There is an argument to be made that based on those standards, she can’t be THAT bad! Right?■

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