

It's A Different World

by June S. Zwickey

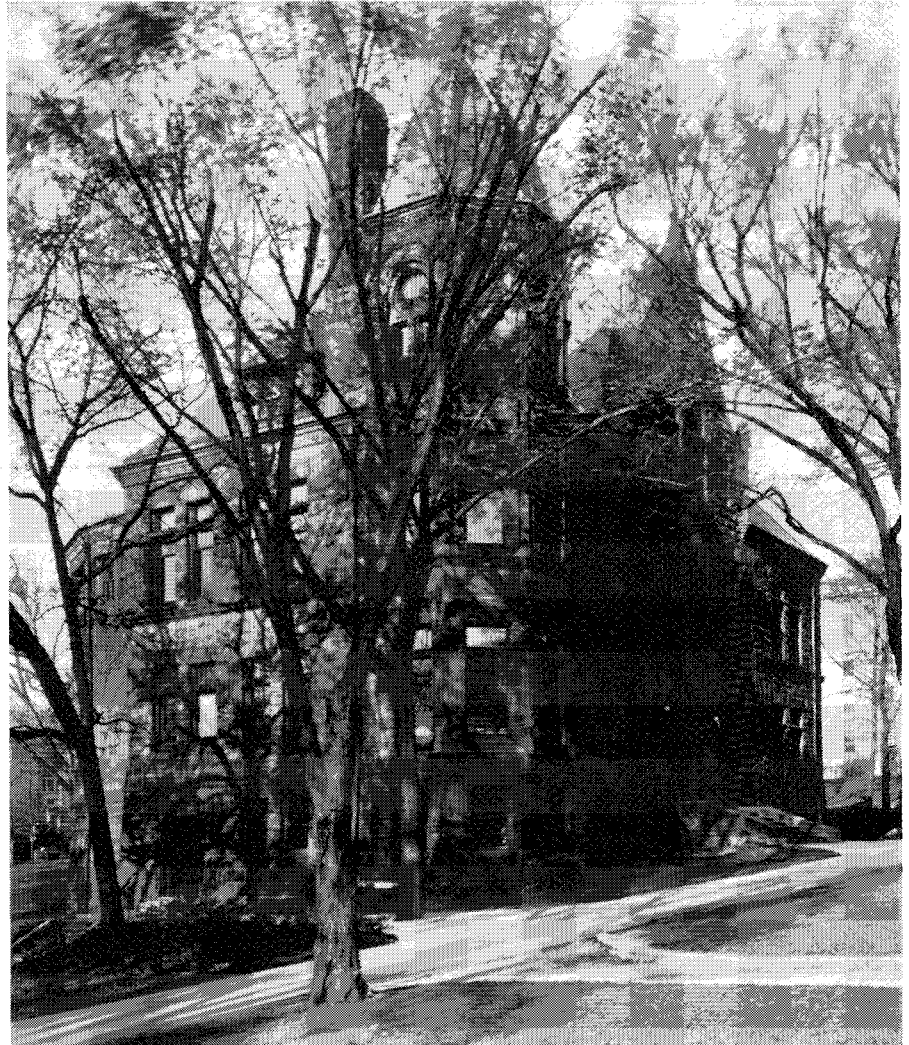
June Spearbraker Zwickey ('36) wrote the following article for Wisconsin Woman magazine. We thought you would enjoy seeing it, comparing your Law School experiences with hers more than 50 years ago. After practicing law in Clintonville, Wisconsin, Ms. Zwickey now resides in Menasha.

Whose idea was it to go to law school in 1933? Mine, I guess. It was not a bad idea, but the timing was not all that great. Those were depression years. Though I didn't have to sell apples on the street corner or stand in line at the soup kitchen, times were tough and the living lean. Most of us had some kind of job. I worked part-time in ladies' lingerie at Kessnich's. I thought it a bit ironic that a tall, skinny female like myself, with practically no bosom, should be trying to sell bras.

I describe this economic situation because I think it accounts at least partially for the attitudes in law school during that era. The important words were "care" and "share." We shared knowledge, books food, clothing, even lodging. When Mike, a good-natured but not very practical Irishman, was unable to pay his rent, he was evicted. For about three weeks, until he could find a new place and scrounge up enough money to pay for it, he "slept around."

Today it is different. The key words seem to be "specialization" and "competition." The political and corporate structure in today's business world has accelerated. We were interested primarily in becoming respectably good lawyers engaging in a sufficiently lucrative private practice. We were taught by the "case method." Each day a certain number of Supreme Court decisions were assigned and discussed in class. Differences of opinion by students relative to the validity of each decision had to be substantiated. Today, I understand, the textbook and lecture methods are used. Office practice courses also are offered in school now. We did our office practice during the summer serving an internship in the office of a practicing attorney.

Age is also an influencing factor. Most of us were in our early 20's. Today the age range is wide. Many work several years prior to entering in order to finance their additional schooling. Some change



careers in midstream. Many of us are married and some have children. Consequently there is not the same perspective.

Entering law school in 1933 took some courage on my part. I was a rather shy, small-town girl whose first two years of college were spent at Milwaukee Downer College, an all-girls' school. The last two years I went to Lawrence, a small private college. The University of Wisconsin was a large public institution, and Madison was a comparatively big city. Law school was a predominantly male environment that intimidated me.

The first couple of weeks were somewhat uncomfortable. Four girls were conspicuous among four hundred fellows. However, when it became apparent that we were all there to learn, that the girls were not there primarily to snare a husband, and that we did not fall over in a dead faint at the use of four-letter words, the atmosphere became more relaxed.

The law building itself was not much of an edifice in those days. The wooden steps and floors were well worn. The banisters and woodwork needed varnish, and the rest rooms left much to be desired. On the first floor were the dean's



office and classrooms with disreputable desks. On the second floor was the library and more classrooms with enormous blackboards. Lockers and the lounge occupied the lower level.

At the beginning of the first semester there seemed to be an unspoken rule that the lounge was off limits to females. When you were finally asked to join the group there, you knew you had it made—you were accepted. It was a cold, uninviting place with crummy furniture littered with books, papers, full ashtrays, and empty bottles, but it was there that the problems of the world were solved—legal, political, and personal. The debates and conversations ranged from deadly serious to utterly ridiculous.

Walking up the hill to the law school we had to pass the engineering building. There was great rivalry between law students and engineering students. They were always heckling one another. The engineers decided to stand out in front of their building and make obscene remarks directed at the female law students walking up the hill. When the male law students discovered this they engaged the engineers in a couple of bouts of fist-cuffs. This put an end to such shenanigans. Male law students were very protective of their own.

And what were the law professors' attitudes towards female students? As soon as they discovered that we weren't

bubbleheads and could comprehend the intricacies of contracts, wills, conveyancing, etc., we became just four of the 400, and there was no discrimination as far as assignments and grades were concerned. One professor, a very staid and proper gentleman, resented us at first. When he called on people in class he addressed them as "Mr." or "Miss." Deep down inside he was a male chauvinist and he almost choked on the word "Miss." He resolved this by calling everyone by his or her last name and omitting the honorific.

Another professor was a small, elderly man with a passion for the ladies. He used to follow us into the stacks in the library hoping for an opportunity to make a pass. Inevitably a male student would follow him and foil his attempts. Today these incidents probably would provoke a charge of sexual harassment. We merely joked about his proclivity and made fun of him.

No assessment of the atmosphere in law school in the '30s would be complete without reference to Miss Mertz. She was the voice of authority in the dean's office. The dean was a quiet intellectual with superlative skills in negotiation and diplomacy, unlike Miss Mertz. She was a big woman with a loud voice. She carried a big stick but did not speak softly. We had to get our grades from her and she was not above giving a vociferous lecture

if we did not live up to her expectations. She insisted a lawyer was first and foremost a scholar, and she wanted things done in a proper fashion. I remember a large sign she once posted on the bulletin board which read something like this:

**"Attention: in re Dean's Reception
—All male students attending must wear ties and suits with vests.
—All female students attending must wear a hat and gloves."**

In the corner at the bottom someone had scribbled, "Also polish shoes or beware of Mertz!" In spite of her more or less tyrannical rule we all loved and respected her—she was a mother figure.

It was an entirely different world then. I would say that in my law school days male and female students enjoyed a very special camaraderie that they probably would never experience again.

At Homecoming, the would-be-lawyers engaged in their traditional ritual of throwing their canes over the goal post at the stadium and it really didn't matter whose cane went the farthest.