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SELMA MOIDEL SMITH'S 70TH ANNIVERSARY AS AN ATTORNEY AND MEMBER OF WLALA

by Ruth D. Kahn



Selma Moidel Smith is legendary in Los Angeles and is a beloved Life Member of WLALA. She served two terms as President (1947, 1948) of the Southern California Women Lawyers, and fulfilled a dream of creating a unified women's bar as a leader of the movement to unify SCWL with the Women Lawyers Club in 1964, creating WLALA. She has continued to contribute to the organization in a variety of ways over the years. On January 5, 2013, Selma will celebrate her 70th anniversary as a lawyer and a member of WLALA.

Selma is a woman of many talents. You will not only find her in the first (1958) and other editions of *Who's Who of American Women*, but also in the Royal Blue Book (London, 1969), the first (1977) and other editions of *Who's Who in American Law*, the *International Encyclopedia of Women Composers* (1987), and other biographical references, including *Who's Who in America*.

Throughout the years, Selma has chaired numerous committees, hosted association events at her home, spoken on legal topics and arranged programs for WLALA. Highlights that are memorable to her, and for which she arranged significant publicity for WLALA on television and in print, include a major WLALA Law Day Luncheon at the Beverly Hilton Hotel in 1966 which she chaired, and to which she invited Spanish-speaking women members of the Los Angeles diplomatic corps as guests and performed at the piano, and most recently, in 2011, a panel discussion on legal pioneer Clara Shortridge Foltz (1849–1934), the first female lawyer to be admitted to the California State Bar, and for whom the Criminal Courts Building in downtown Los Angeles is named.

For several years before the Clara Shortridge Foltz Criminal Justice Center was renamed to honor Foltz in 2002, Selma served on the planning committee to immortalize the trailblazer who began studying law in 1876 to support herself and her five children after her husband deserted her. At the time only white males were permitted under California law to become members of the state bar. A role model for all, Foltz authored a bill which replaced the term "white male" with the word, "person," and in 1878 she was admitted to the California bar and began a 56-year career in which she became a leader in favor of women's rights.

A life-long learner with many diverse and overlapping interests, Selma, who is fluent in Spanish, represented several women's bar associations at the Washington World Conference on World Peace through Law in 1965, where she served as a host for Latin American judges and lawyers. Music always has been an important part of her life as well. Selma has composed more than 100 piano and instrumental pieces, including a suite for orchestra entitled *Espressivo*, which was performed at Walt Disney Concert Hall in July 2010 by the Los Angeles Lawyers Philharmonic. At WLALA's Annual Awards and Installation Dinner in September 2010, outgoing WLALA President Helen B. Kim who is a graduate of The Juilliard School, performed a *Musical Interlude* of Selma's piano pieces that were arranged by Selma especially for the occasion. Additionally, Selma was the first bilingual docent for the Los Angeles Philharmonic, giving in-school music presentations in Spanish-speaking communities and appearing, at the piano, on educational television.

Many wonderful articles have been published over the years. I commend to you three articles in particular:

(1) *A Tribute to Selma*, by Justice Kathryn Mickle Werdegar of the California Supreme Court on behalf of the California Supreme Court Historical Society, June 2012, <http://www.americanbarfoundation.org/uploads/cms/documents/cschsnewsss12-selma.pdf>;

(2) *Prologue*, by Malinda C. Allen on behalf of the American Bar Association Senior Lawyers Division, dedicating the Spring 2012 issue of *Experience* magazine to Selma, <http://www.americanbarfoundation.org/uploads/cms/documents/selma-experiencededication2012.pdf>; and

(3) *California Life Fellow Selma Moidel Smith*, American Bar Foundation, October 2010, <http://www.americanbarfoundation.org/fellows/news/226>.

Additionally, WLALA is privileged to have videotaped oral histories of Selma twice, in 1987 and again in 2001.

Selma, you are an inspiration and role model and I can't think of a better place to showcase that right now than the January 2013 issue of the WLALA newsletter as you celebrate your 70th anniversary as a member of the California State Bar and of WLALA (since the age of 23).

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