



Friday, January 17, 2020

Special Section

PERSONALITY PROFILE:  
**SELMA MOIDEL SMITH**

**Attorney and Composer,  
She Is Known As a ‘Renaissance Woman’**

By a MetNews Staff Writer

**W**HEN A CHILD WAS BORN IN WARREN, OHIO on April 3, 1919, to Mary and Louis Moidel, little would it have been imagined—other than by her parents—that she would become an attorney at law, and beyond that, a member of the legal profession of considerable note.

Such lofty attainment was simply not expected of a girl in that day, when the destiny of one of her gender was presumed to be, if not that of a housewife, that of a nurse, a school teacher, a clerk at a millenary store, or some similar undertaking.

Mary Moidel had wanted to become a lawyer, herself, but lacked the opportunity to fulfill that desire. She was determined that her new-born daughter—as well as her four other children—would go to law school.

That daughter, now 100 years old and known as Selma Moidel Smith, received her law degree from USC in 1941, became a member of the State Bar of California on Jan. 5, 1943, at age 23, and served in 1947 and 1948 as president of the Southern California Women Lawyers Association (now known as the Women Lawyers Association of Los Angeles). She practiced law for more than 40 years.

Not only did she excel in the legal field, Smith is the composer of more than 100 piano and instrumental pieces—some of which the local legal community has heard performed in recent years by the Los Angeles Lawyers Philharmonic, under the baton of attorney Gary S. Greene. Smith, who was able to read music by the age of 5, is listed in the International Encyclopedia of Women Composers.



Smith is at the Washington World Conference on World Peace Through Law with Chief Justice Earl Warren, honorary conference chair, at the U.S. Supreme Court Building in 1965.

### **Heading to Hollywood**

As a tyke, Smith moved with her family to Hollywood in 1929. Reflecting on her childhood, Smith says the household was one in which the concept of what is now called a “glass ceiling” was simply not recognized.

She recounts that her mother “felt very much that I was going where she could not.”

Once Smith became a member of the legal profession, and, as it became increasingly recognized that women do have a place there, she included her mother at bar events “whenever possible,” she says, “so that she could see what had been achieved.”

### **Joins Brothers’ Firm**

There was no question, after Smith gained bar membership, as to which law firm she would join. It was foreseen by Los Angeles Times writer in a May 31, 1936 feature that says:

“ ‘Moidel, Moidel, Moidel, Moidel & Moidel, Miss Higgenbotham speaking!’

“Four years from now it is almost certain you will get such a response should you call this Los Angeles law firm.

“ ‘I wish to speak to Attorney Moidel,’ you may ask after the Moidel echoes have subsided.

“ ‘All the Moidels are attorneys,’ the operator more than likely will reply.

“The answer is that Isadore and Jacob Moidel, who have practiced law here a good many years, were joined recently by their brother, Mitchel Moidel, a practicing lawyer from Ohio, and by their sister, Gussie Moidel, who has just been graduated from law school and will take her bar examination soon.

“The fifth member of the firm will be Selma Moidel, law student and defense counsel in the girls’ court of Manual Arts High School. At the completion of her high school course next month she will enter law school and upon graduation will join her brothers and sisters, forming, as far as can be learned, the only quintuplet family law firm in the country.”



Above is the photo accompanying the 1936 article in the Los Angeles Times. The caption reads: “How brief would be the brief that five lawyers, all bearing the family name, might prepare? That question, may come up four years hence when, the Moidel sons and daughters have their five names painted on a law firm office door. From left to right they are Selma, Mitchel, Jacob, Isadore and Gussie Moidel all of whom will rally under the same firm banner as soon as Selma, the youngest Portia, completes her law course.”

### **Immediate Leadership Role**

On the very day Smith was admitted to practice—Jan. 5, 1943—she joined the Southern California Women Lawyers. She lost no time in assuming a leadership role in that organization; she was its treasurer that year. While there was a dearth of female lawyers then—about 200 in Los Angeles—the ranks were not so slim that her immediate assumption of an officer post lacked significance.

She became the recording secretary in 1944, was corresponding secretary the following year, first vice president the next, and ascended to the presidency in 1947, at the age of 27. Smith was then elected to a second one-year term.

For years, she lined up speakers for the group.

“I organized events that today we would call ‘continuing legal education’—45 years before it became mandatory in California—to provide a series of high-level educational speakers to whom women lawyers in particular might not have had access at that time,” Smith recounts.

She also proved to be ahead of her time when, in 1948, she presented a paper, by invitation, at the Conference of the International Bar Association at The Hague. Smith advocated clinical training in law schools—then a novel suggestion, now a common component of law schools’ curriculums.

### **Women’s’ Rights**

As a director of the California Business Women’s Council (from 1949-52), she lobbied for the “Wives’ Paycheck Bill,” which afforded a married woman the right to collect her own paychecks—previously a husband’s prerogative. On June 16, 1951, Governor Earl Warren signed the bill into law.

Smith was president of the Los Angeles Business Women’s Council in 1952. That was the year U.S. Sen. Richard M. Nixon, R-Calif., was elected vice president of the United States (later to assume higher office). Smith lobbied Warren for the appointment by him of a qualified woman to fill the 1953 vacancy.

### **Led Unification Effort**

In 1964, Smith was a leader of the movement to merge the Southern California Women Lawyers with the Women Lawyers Club, forming the Women Lawyers Association of Los Angeles. At WLALA’s September 1996 installation and awards dinner, Smith became the only person, before or since, to receive an honorary lifetime membership in the organization.

The National Association of Women Lawyers—which Smith also joined in 1943—in 1999 conferred its Lifetime of Service Award on her, and in 2005 created the Selma Moidel Smith Law Student Writing Competition award, which it presents annually.

Kathryn Werdegar, while a justice of the California Supreme Court, once observed that “every organization Selma joins ultimately places her at its helm or in a position of leadership.”

An unusual leadership role for an attorney was in connection with the Women’s Medical College of Pennsylvania, established in 1850 to train women, exclusively, to become doctors. In 1953, Smith was named to its national board and helped charter that board. Another member of the board was actress Grace Kelly, later known as Princess Grace. (The college decided in 1970 to admit men and became the Medical College of Pennsylvania.) Smith served as the board’s president in 1980–82.



**Selma Moidel Smith is seen at the Women Lawyers Association of Los Angeles Law Day Luncheon on April 27, 1968, with, to the right, Los Angeles Superior Court Judge Kathleen Parker then-Assembly member Yvonne Brathwaite, later Yvonne Brathwaite Burke, who was to become a member of Congress and a member of the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors. Parker, since deceased, and Burke are both past “persons of the year.”**



A Sept. 15, 1965 article in the San Fernando Valley Times bore the headline, “Mrs. Smith Goes to Washington.” It reports:

“Mrs. Selma Moidel Smith of Encino is attending the first Washington World Conference on World Peace Through Law in Washington, D.C. this week.

“She is serving as World Law Day Chairman for the Women Lawyers’ Association, a member of the Spanish Committee of the World Peace Through Law Center in Washington which is sponsoring the conference, and International Spanish Liaison and National Spanish Chairman for the United States of the World Law Day Committee of the International Federation of Women Lawyers.

“She is also the representative for the California members of the National Association of Women Lawyers, representative for Iota Tau Tau International Scholastic Legal Sorority, a member of the National Board of the Woman’s Medical College of Pennsylvania and a member of the International Platform Association.”

Smith recalls: “My role was two-fold, first to represent women in the profession, and second, because I am fluent in Spanish, as a member of the Foreign Language Committee where I served as a host and interpreter for Latin-American judges and lawyers. So, in both respects, my role was to build bridges for understanding—between men and women and between nations.”



In this 2017 photo, Selma Moidel Smith, at right, waves her arms to the beat of “Selma’s Samba,” being played by Gary S. Greene, Esq. and His Big Band of Barristers at a joint meeting of the Italian American Lawyers Association and the Senior Lawyers Section of the Los Angeles County Bar Association.

Assessing the progress women have made in the legal profession, she says:

“Today, there is almost nothing women have not achieved in the law, except that they are still behind in leadership positions and pay. But the major change I’ve seen is that a woman lawyer is no longer considered a singular peculiarity who has to justify her presence and by whom all other women lawyers will be judged.”

At age 100, Smith remains editor-in-chief of California Legal History, published annually by the California Supreme Court Historical Society, of which she has been a director since 2001, and continues as the National Association of Women Lawyers’s liaison to the American Bar Association’s Senior Lawyers Division, as she has been since 1996.

Selma Moidel Smith. She’s been an attorney, a composer, a poet. Speaker, legislative advocate, organizer. Writer, editor. Pianist, violinist, Spanish guitarist. The awards she has received are countless. She will receive another on Jan. 31 as a 2019 “Person of the Year.

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### Comments

The irrepressible Selma Smith has nurtured and set the example for many generations of attorneys, judges, and justices, including me. As her extraordinary CV reflects, Selma, a storied lawyer, works tirelessly to better the profession and has achieved the highest honors the legal profession can bestow. She is an inspiration to us all. Congratulations dear Selma on this much deserved award!

—**Tani Cantil-Sakauye**  
Chief Justice, California

I met Selma Moidel Smith 11 years ago when I founded the LA Lawyers Philharmonic. And since that time, we have become very good friends. We have a lot in common since we are both attorneys and musicians.

Selma has had a remarkable career in the law and has taken on leadership positions since her admission to the California Bar in 1943. At the same time, she pursued her interests in music. Selma is a very talented musician and composer of more than 100 piano and instrumental pieces.

It was my orchestras privilege to perform some of her works at Walt Disney Concert Hall to standing ovations. Her leadership skills in law combined with her passion for music are an inspiration to me in helping bring harmony to our profession.

—**Gary S. Greene**  
Attorney, Conductor, Lawyers Philharmonic



## Persons of the Year Dinner

By a MetNews Staff Writer



Metropolitan News-Enterprise Co-Publisher Jo-Ann W. Grace, left, presents Los Angeles Superior Court Presiding Judge Kevin Brazile with a “Person of the Year” Award.



Jo-Ann Grace congratulates attorney/composer Selma Moidel Smith, right, while Smith’s son Mark Smith, center, holds the “Person of the Year” Award. Smith, admitted to the State Bar in 1943, is 100 years old.



Metropolitan News-Enterprise Editor/ Co-Publisher Roger M. Grace, left, presents award to Los Angeles County Bar Association President Ronald F. Brot.

The “Persons of the Year” dinner on Friday was marked by accolades not only for the honorees, but for others, with former District Attorney Robert Philibosian departing from the customary nonpartisan nature of the event by calling for the reelection of Jackie Lacey as chief prosecutor, and Superior Court Presiding Judge Kevin Brazile hailing Lee Baca, as the former sheriff readied to report to a federal prison.

Philibosian—who was district attorney from 1981-84 and is now of counsel to Sheppard Mullin Richter & Hampton—was serving as emcee for the twenty-fifth time at the Metropolitan News-Enterprise’s annual event.

“I’m going to go off-script,” he said, in introducing Lacey, who was one of those presenting commendations to the “Persons of the Year,” Brazile, Los Angeles County Bar Association President Ronald Brot, and 100-year-old attorney and composer Selma Moidel Smith. Philibosian proceeded to present unscheduled and extemporaneous remarks.

“It’s not a political event,” he recited, but said, “we’re among friends here.”



## **Blasts Incumbent's Challengers**

He proceeded to lambaste Lacey's two rivals in the March 3 primary, former San Francisco District Attorney George Gascón and former federal Assistant Public Defender Rachel Rossi, asserting they are not even qualified to "sharpen pencils" at the DA's Office.

Philibosian's spirited oratory sparked loud applause from many who were present at the black-tie event, attended by more than 200 persons, although some hands remained motionless.

When Lacey came to the microphone to make her presentations, she made note "for the record" that she did not embrace Philibosian's remarks about her opponents, explaining:

"It's not my style."

Brot, in offering remarks later, made reference to "our current and next district attorney, Jackie Lacey."

## **Brazile's Remarks**

Brazile, in addressing the audience after being handed his "Person of the Year" award, did not hesitate to praise Baca, who left two days later by van to report to a minimum security prison near El Paso, Texas. The U.S. Supreme Court on Jan. 13 denied a petition for a writ of certiorari, leaving in place Baca's conviction in the U.S. District Court for the Central District of California for obstruction of justice in connection with an FBI probe—which Baca asserted entailed unlawful actions—of jail conditions in Los Angeles County.

At Friday night's dinner, the presiding judge, who had been a deputy in the County Counsel's Office from 1984 until his appointment to the bench in 2002, said that some "of the best times" in his life were those he experienced while acting as a legal advisor to the Sheriff's Department. It was then that he had contact with Baca.

He recounted:

"We talked about many things. We talked about leadership, we talked about friendship.

"We talked about being a man, being a person."

Brazile told the former sheriff, who was seated at a table sponsored by attorney John Moriarity:

"You've always been a friend, you've always been a supporter. I can't thank you enough.

"God bless you, my friend."

(It was Brazile's cousin, federal Judge Percy Anderson, who sentenced Baca.)

## **Praise for Others**

Brazile had words of praise, also, for former County Counsel Lloyd "Bill" Pellman and his wife, Kathleen Formanack, terming them "probably the most important mentors and friends in my life."

He said of Pellman, now a partner in Nossaman LLP:

"I've known Bill for over 35 years. He's always been there to give me advice, encouragement, support."

Of Assistant Presiding Judge Eric Taylor, Brazile said:

"His dedication, hard work and talents make it possible for me to do the job of presiding judge. He's clearly the best assistant presiding judge any presiding judge, such as myself, could ever have."

Brazile also paid tribute to two of the presenters.

"The Los Angeles Superior Court appreciates the extraordinary job that you do as a member of the Board of Supervisors," he told Kathryn Barger, who chairs the board.

He related that Lacey has "been a role model" for him.

## **Accolades for Brazile**

Barger said of Brazile:

"He's known for his warmth, his compassion, and truly his dedication to his job. Judge Brazile is a strong leader...."

Los Angeles Police Chief Michel Moore termed him "a quiet giant" whose quest is fairness.

Lacey said Brazile is “a friend and a partner in the justice system.”

Brot lauded the presiding judge as “an exemplary leader of our court system,” a “champion of the mission of diversity,” and someone who is “open, honest, and caring about our system.”

METNEWS Co-Publisher Jo-Ann W. Grace, in presenting an award to Brazile as the 66th “Person of the Year,” recalled the jingle for a product line of baked goods, “Nobody doesn’t like Sara Lee.” She expressed confidence that “Nobody doesn’t like Kevin Brazile.”

Grace remarked:

“He is a warm individual, sincere—a non-phony. As a judge, he drew plaudits from the bar. Now, as an administrator, his colleagues heap praise on him.”

### **Brot Commended**

Brot is the third president since a contested election in 2016—the first in 25 years—which resulted in reform-minded members taking over the leadership of LACBA, which appeared headed for bankruptcy. Barger—whose perspective of the legal community is enhanced by virtue of her brother, John M. Barger being an attorney, as was her late father, Richards Dale Barger—said of Brot:

“In his role in the Los Angeles County Bar Association, he was a staunch advocate for change. He was unafraid to call out unfairness and spoke up for unity among members in the face of a culture that has been traditionally alienated.

“Brot is a reformer and a voice of reason—and gosh, can we use that now.

“His conviction has made way for the bar association to prioritize fiscal responsibility and bring new dedication to its members.”

In presenting the “Person of the Year” award to Brot, METNEWS Editor/Co-Publisher Roger M. Grace said the honoree is leading LACBA “back to solvency and respectability,” commenting:

“He is doing so with determination, but also with tact and a gentle touch. Ron is both a warrior and a peacemaker.”

Brot reflected:

“We have sought to reshape the bar—and we have. The resurgent energy and enthusiasm for LACBA is remarkable.”

### **Smith’s Feats Acclaimed**

Barger told Smith, who is age 100:

“We want to thank you, Ms. Smith, for your rich legacy in Los Angeles County, both in law and in music.”

Brot declared that she “is no ordinary lawyer,” calling her “the embodiment of a true Renaissance woman.”

Lacey observed that Smith is described by the word “trailblazer.”

Jo-Ann Grace said that Smith “is a lawyer, a composer, a writer, a speaker, a musician, a dancer and a diplomat,” adding:

“Her accomplishments and honors are legion—yet she’s approachable and unpretentious.”

Smith told the well-wishers:

“I thank you one and all for an occasion I will remember for all of the years of my life to come.”

Past “persons of the year” in attendance were Philibosian, Lacey, and Baca, along with former District Attorney Steve Cooley, former Court of Appeal Presiding Justice Norman Epstein, “teddy bear attorney” Ernestine Fields, Lawyers Philharmonic founder/conductor Gary S. Greene, LACBA Past President Brian Kabateck, former State Bar President Patrick M. Kelly, former LACBA President Michael E. Meyer, attorney/bar leader Alice A. Salvo, and former Beverly Hills Bar Association Chief Executive Officer Mark Staenberg.

## **Brazile, Brot, Smith Named METNEWS 2019 ‘Persons of the Year’**

By a MetNews Staff Writer



**KEVIN BRAZILE**  
*Los Angeles Superior Court Presiding  
Judge*



**RONALD F. BROT**  
*Los Angeles County Bar Association*



**SELMA MOIDEL SMITH**  
*Attorney/Composer*

Los Angeles Superior Court Presiding Judge Kevin Brazile, Los Angeles County Bar Association President Ronald F. Brot, and attorney/composer Selma Moidel Smith have been designated by the Metropolitan News-Enterprise as 2019 “Persons of the Year.”

The “POY” Award will be presented to them at the 32nd annual awards dinner, with public officials also bestowing commendations. The black-tie event will be held at a private club in downtown Los Angeles (the rules of which preclude identifying it other than in invitations).

An invitation will be appearing shortly on the website at [www.metnews.com](http://www.metnews.com).

Former Los Angeles County District Attorney Robert H. Philibosian, now of counsel to Sheppard Mullin, will serve as emcee at the dinner for the 24th time.

In early January, a special “Persons of the Year” section containing profiles of the honorees, along with tributes to them by members of the legal community, will be included in an edition of the METNEWS.

Co-Publisher Jo-Ann W. Grace yesterday said of Brazile:

“He is a man who smiles, who hugs, who loves people—and attracts warm feelings and confidence. It is clear that those both inside and outside the Superior Court hold him in topmost regard both for his personal qualities and his abilities and successes.

“Despite his high visibility post and the hard decisions he must constantly make, Judge Brazile appears to be without detractors.”

## **Brot Sounded Alarm**

Of Brot, she remarked:

“He was one of the first to sound an alarm, initially unheeded, that LACBA was on the wrong track, that it was alienating those who were members of the association based on kinship to one or more of its specialty sections, which were being regimented and ill-served. There did, however, develop a wide awareness that Brot was right; a reform movement was formed and it gained offices in a contested election—the first in 25 years—in 2016.

“With tact, inventiveness, and spirit, Brot is continuing and building upon the wise reform efforts of his immediate predecessors as president, Mike Meyer and Brian Kabateck, in the quest to return LACBA to fiscal soundness, responsiveness to members’ needs, and relevancy—and, as they did, he has made huge strides.”

## **100-Year-Old Honoree**

Grace hailed Smith—who this year turned 100—as “a pioneering woman lawyer who has achieved mightily.” The honoree was admitted to the State Bar of California on Jan. 5, 1943; her bar number is 18051.

Smith is the only honorary life member of the Women Lawyers Association of Los Angeles, of which she was president in 1947 and 1948.

The newspaper’s co-publisher lauded Smith’s “amazing talent” as a music composer, noting that a few of her more than 100 pieces have been played in public performances by the Los Angeles Lawyers Philharmonic.

Brazile’s law degree is from UCLA; Brot’s is from the University of Michigan; Smith received hers from USC.

Counting Brazile, Brot and Smith, there have been 63 “Persons of the Year.” The first was Court of Appeal Presiding Justice Mildred L. Lillie, now deceased, who was named in 1983.

She and the next four honorees, each being the respective year’s single designee—California Supreme Court Justice Stanley Mosk, Court of Appeal Presiding Justice Lester Wm. Roth, Los Angeles Superior Court Judge Kathleen Parker (all deceased), and then-Los Angeles Superior Court Judge Billy G. Mills (now retired)—were recognized, only in print. The annual dinners were launched in 1988.

“Persons of the year” since then have included two California chief justices, four Court of Appeal presiding justices (and three future presiding justices), six Los Angeles Superior Court presiding judges, three assistant presiding judges of that court, two U.S. District Court judges, four State Bar presidents (and one future president of that group), five Los Angeles County Bar Association presidents, two district attorneys, two law school deans, two sheriffs, two county supervisors, a state attorney general, a county public defender, and a Los Angeles city attorney.



# Metropolitan News Enterprise<sup>(R)</sup>

on Jan. 31, 2020  
will be honoring

**KEVIN BRAZILE**

Presiding Judge, Los Angeles Superior Court



**RONALD F. BROT**

President, Los Angeles County Bar Association



**SELMA MOIDEL SMITH**

Attorney, Composer



as

*Persons of the Year*

for 2019

The **32nd annual event** will take place on the First Floor of the California Club, at 538 South Flower Street Los Angeles.\* Cocktails at 5:30 p.m. and dinner at 6:30 p.m. Black tie.

Former Los Angeles District Attorney Robert H. Philibosian will serve as emcee, for the 24th time. Presenters will be Los Angeles Superior Court Presiding Judge Kevin Brazile (conferring scrolls on the other honorees), Los Angeles County District Attorney Jackie Lacey, Los Angeles County Supervisor Kathryn Barger, Los Angeles Police Chief Michel R. Moore; and Los Angeles County Bar Association President Ronald Brot (presenting to the other honorees).

\$220 per person;

\$2,100 for a table of 10 (if payment is made by a single check or credit card/PayPal transaction.)

The reservations deadline is Jan. 24, unless the event is sold out earlier.

No tickets will be sold at the door.