



## Pillsbury Chair Mary Cranston Wins ABA Commission Award

By Selma Moidel Smith

*Smith is a past chair of the Experience Editorial Board and the Assistant Secretary of the Senior Lawyers Division. She is a past president of the Women Lawyers Association of Los Angeles. She has been honored by the National Association of Women Lawyers with their Lifetime of Service Award and the creation of the Selma Moidel Smith Law Student Writing Competition.*

“One of the 100 Most Influential Lawyers in America” . . . “One of the Two Best Law Firm Leaders in the United States” . . . Such accolades were given to Mary B. Cranston by the *National Law Review* (2000) and *Of Counsel* (2002). Now, she has been honored by the ABA Commission on Women in the Profession with a Margaret Brent Women Lawyers of Achievement Award, presented at the Annual Meeting in Chicago on August 7, 2005.

Cranston is the first woman to chair an “Am Law 100” law firm, listed by *The American Lawyer*. She was elected chair of San Francisco’s oldest and largest firm, Pillsbury Madison & Sutro, in 1998, and presided over the mergers by which the firm became Pillsbury Winthrop Shaw Pittman, with 900 lawyers in 16 offices worldwide. She served previously as chair of the firm’s Litigation Department,

and her areas of practice are complex class action litigation, antitrust and securities actions, and regulated industries.

Cranston was one of the first women elected a Fellow of the American College of Trial Lawyers. She has served the ABA Antitrust Section as an officer and section delegate, and is a past chair of the Antitrust and Trade Regulation Committee of the State Bar of California.

She expressed the following thoughts to this writer during an interview at the firm’s office in San Francisco on June 10, 2005.

### **Is there any particular case that you feel was pivotal in the development of your career?**

Very early on, I worked on a massive price-fixing case for our client, Chevron. It was a claim brought by a number of states that the major oil companies were fixing prices. It was one of those cases

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that had casts of thousands of lawyers representing each of the defendants, and the states had large teams of lawyers. It was a huge case, and I was a fairly junior lawyer, but it turned out there was a potential counterclaim by some of the oil companies against the state for failure to run the major offshore oil fields in California appropriately. We felt they were manipulating the production in those fields to change the price.

A lot of the senior lawyers in the case thought it was a throwaway, so they allowed me to take charge of that counterclaim. Since it was mine, I gave it my all and really dug into it. We found quite a bit of evidence, and it turned out to be a pretty significant matter. I was able to do early arguments and trial work on that counterclaim as a lead lawyer way before I would otherwise have had the chance. It was ultimately a significant

chip in the resolution of the case. That was probably my earliest break. It gave me a taste for being in charge of litigation and having the ability to put together the whole gestalt and themes of the case, which turns out to be something I enjoy.

**So this became a turning point in your own thinking?**

Yes, I wanted to be a lead trial lawyer, and I also realized that controlling a lot of business in a law firm was the ticket to glory, so I set myself these big goals for business development. At that point, of course, I had no clue of how to do it, but I could tell if a small step would lead me in the right direction, so I just didn't give up. It took me five years, but I was able to achieve them, and that gave me a lot of confidence. If you're willing to challenge yourself, and if you're willing to look your fears in the face, and if you're willing to be a bulldog about what you want, you can get there. And that really was the ticket to my success as a lawyer. Over time, I did become a very big rainmaker in the firm and was in demand as a lead trial lawyer.

**Did you have professors in law school who influenced your direction, or who inspired you?**

There were two at Stanford that I would mention. One was Barbara Babcock, who was the only woman professor. Not only was she, or is she, a brilliant intellect, but she is one of the nicest human beings on earth, and she gave all her free time to mentoring the young women. And then another professor that was quite influential to me was Bill Baxter, who was teaching antitrust and was—he's passed away—a very brilliant economist. I've always enjoyed economics. That was probably the area of the law that I found the most intellectually challenging, and it turned out to be the path that I followed with my career.

I had the benefit of some truly excellent professors and a gifted law school education. I have a lifelong affiliation with Stanford, and I'm very attached to

**SLD Event Calendar**

**Meetings**

February 9–11, 2006  
**2006 Midyear Meeting**  
Hyatt Regency Hotel  
Chicago, Illinois

February 23–24, 2006  
**SLD/ALI-ABA Course of Study on Elder Law**  
Scottsdale Plaza Resort  
Scottsdale, Arizona

April 23–25, 2006  
**2006 Spring Meeting**  
The Mills House  
Charleston, South Carolina

August 3–5, 2006  
**2006 Annual Meeting**  
Hilton Hawaiian Village  
Honolulu, Hawaii

**Social Trip**

November 28–29, 2005  
**U.S. Supreme Court Trip**  
J.W. Marriott Hotel  
Washington, D.C.

it. In terms of service, I've done just about everything there is to do. They have given me many honors, and I was happy to be elected a trustee so I could see everything from that perspective.

**And when you completed your scholastic preparation, where did you apply for a position?**

I went into the law firm of which I'm now the chair, so I'm one of those people who's had a very consistent career. In 1975, I went to Pillsbury Madison & Sutro because they were the oldest law firm in San Francisco—the largest, the most established—and they had a tremendous antitrust department. Because of my training in economics as an undergrad and with Bill Baxter, I was put on very large antitrust cases. I was given the assignment of working with the economists, and so I avoided a lot of the drudgery of the document work of those big cases and got right into the meat of the substantive issues. That was very lucky, so I enjoyed it from the beginning. I also was able to work with some tremendously talented trial lawyers who helped me a lot and gave me a very good early start in trial skills. One of the clients I worked with from the beginning was what was then Pacific Telephone and Telegraph, and is now part of SBC, so I also developed a deep expertise in telecommunications regulation, especially as it interacts with the antitrust laws. That was how my career got started.

**Is there any advice you would give members of the Senior Lawyers Division?**

The second half of a life, I think, is the time to give back. What kind of legacy do you want to leave, and where is your passion and your heart, and can you set your life up so you are in a place to give back?

In my own personal life, I have discovered that certain things, like the acuity of my memory, are not as good as they used to be, but my ability to see the

big picture and put together things, disparate things, actually gets better and better. So, that's a skill that the older generation has that may not actually be appreciated by younger folks because they haven't lived there yet. They're using their raw ability to assimilate as their main tool, and in later years you're using—a good word for it would be—wisdom, or your judgment. That's a real gift, and it's very important that we realize it's a gift, and that it's very needed.

For the senior women lawyers, one crying need is for older women mentors. In a typical law firm, there may be 50 percent women associates, but only in the best case 25 percent women partners, and those women get very overtaxed in terms of mentoring. I think that offering to be a very safe sounding board for young women is an extremely valuable thing to do, and that's something that I always make time for.

**What about second careers for senior lawyers?**

I think it's important in your later years to not be afraid to give up the career path that you've spent so much time building. I see people hanging on to a particular job or situation, even though it's getting to be a little tedious for them, and I think it's because they think it's their last hurrah. The fantasy in people's minds is that, "It's my job as I'm doing it today—or the park bench, with nobody wanting me and nobody caring about me."

You have to shut one door before the other doors open, and have faith and confidence that there is something very valuable that you're going to be contributing. The good news about the later years is that you usually are financially in a position that gives you the ability to find something that may not be as remunerative but is really interesting to you. Visualize what would be a truly fun way to spend the next 10 years and shut the door on what you're doing now if it precludes you from doing that. Let the other door open up. ■

**What kind of legacy do you want to leave, and where is your passion and your heart . . . ?**