

The Right to Practice Law

**From the President's Column in the October 2007
newsletter of the Georgia Association for Women Lawyers**

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In 1911, only three states in the Union did not let women practice law – and one of them was Georgia. But that year Minnie Hale Daniel became the first woman to graduate from a Georgia law school, and she set out to change the system.

Minnie tried going through the court system, all the way to the Supreme Court – twice. But the courts told her their hands were tied, because Georgia had a law that provided that women couldn't practice law.

So Minnie Hale Daniel took her fight to the legislature. For four years she showed up at the legislative sessions and fought for the right to practice law, and each year she lost. But in 1916, she finally won her point, and the Georgia legislature passed the "Women's Lawyer Bill," allowing women to practice law in Georgia.

In 1928, Minnie Hale Daniel and the 18 other women lawyers in Georgia founded the Georgia Association for Women Lawyers, and they elected Minnie Hale Daniel as their first President.

When Minnie Hale Daniel went to law school, she knew that in order to practice law, she would have to pass a lot of very tough courses, just as every other student would have to do. But unlike every other student, Minnie Hale Daniel also knew that in order to practice law, she would have to change the law.

When we consider the statistics, we easily can become discouraged. Only 13% of partners in law firms are women, female lawyers are overwhelmingly less satisfied with their jobs than male lawyers, and they are paid only 60 cents for every dollar male lawyers are paid for comparable work.

But when we feel discouraged, we should think back to GAWL's roots. Minnie Hale Daniel could have give up before law school, or after law school, or after her first trip to the Supreme Court, or her second, or her first year at the legislature, or her second, or her third, or her fourth. But she didn't, for the profoundly simple reason that she wanted to practice law.

We have exactly the same incentive. Banded together as GAWL, we can make fundamental changes in the way law is practiced. Please join us. Help us publish more studies about how women are faring in law, host our next Leadership Academy for women lawyers, or broadcast our Atlanta programs via podcast and streaming video to women all over the state.

Help us make a difference – for the profoundly simple reason that you want to practice law. And 80 years from now, a GAWL President will be writing in this column that women lawyers should take courage from what the members of GAWL did back in 2008.

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