

8-12-2011

Judith McKelvey, Golden Gate University School of Law

Erik Cummins

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.law.ggu.edu/deanmckelvey>



Part of the [Law Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Cummins, Erik, "Judith McKelvey, Golden Gate University School of Law" (2011). *1973-1981: Judith McKelvey*. Paper 3.
<http://digitalcommons.law.ggu.edu/deanmckelvey/3>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Deans of the Law School at GGU Law Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in 1973-1981: Judith McKelvey by an authorized administrator of GGU Law Digital Commons. For more information, please contact jfischer@ggu.edu.

The Enterprise Myth: Separating eDiscovery Fact from Fiction 

AN IPRO WEBINAR EVENT

September 21 | 1:00pm ET [Register NOW](#)

THE RECORDER

ESSENTIAL CALIFORNIA LEGAL CONTENT

ALM Properties, Inc.

Page printed from: [The Recorder](#)

[Back to Article](#)

Judith McKelvey, Golden Gate University School of Law

One of the first women law school deans in the country, she "broke through glass ceilings long before anyone ever used that term."

Erik Cummins

2011-09-12 02:44:35 PM

Taking a part-time teaching job while she awaited her California Bar results, Judith McKelvey went on to spend more than 30 years at Golden Gate University School of Law and served as its dean during a time of pivotal growth for the school in the 1970s.

McKelvey was only the second woman to become dean of an ABA-accredited law school in California, and was among the early women leaders of the Bar Association of San Francisco and the California Women Lawyers Association.

"The mid-'70s were an extraordinary time to be the dean of any American law school, but it was especially so at Golden Gate," McKelvey recalled in a written history of the school. "The civil rights movement, the women's movement and the Warren Supreme Court had collectively produced a massive interest in going to law school among women, minorities and activists who believed they could make American society more just."

McKelvey joined the school's faculty in 1968 and was appointed dean in 1973. At the time, the school was rapidly growing and McKelvey hoped to achieve the coveted Association of American Law Schools accreditation. Seven years later and after adding faculty, increasing salaries, moving into a new building and expanding its library, the school was so honored. According to a profile of McKelvey upon her retirement from teaching in 1999, she said she considered the designation her most important achievement as dean.

McKelvey, who lives today in Marin County, was not available to be interviewed.

Drucilla Ramey, the former executive director of the Bar Association of San Francisco and the law school's current dean, describes McKelvey as having "a sophisticated political savvy and decisiveness about where we should be going that advanced all of us."

Another former dean of the school, Peter Keane, said McKelvey "broke through glass ceilings long before anyone ever used that term."

In 1974, McKelvey was part of the group that organized California Women Lawyers, and served as the group's first regular president in 1975. (Joan Dempsey Klein earlier served as the organization's provisional president.)

She also became involved in the Bar Association of San Francisco, becoming its second woman president in 1985. Criticism of then-Chief Justice Rose Bird was reaching a fever pitch at the time, and one of McKelvey's initiatives was promoting the independence of the judiciary. It was also around that time that BASF was seeking a new executive director — it would turn to Ramey, who had been teaching at Golden Gate.

McKelvey served as dean of Golden Gate until 1981 and returned to teaching constitutional and property law full time.

Growing up in Wauwatosa, Wis., near Milwaukee, she earned her undergraduate and law degrees at the University of Wisconsin. "My father encouraged me to become a lawyer," McKelvey once said. "One of his main points was that I should be independent and not rely on a man in order to exist. That was a radical notion at the time."

McKelvey worked several years for the Federal Communications Commission in Washington, D.C., before moving to the Bay Area and joining Golden Gate in 1968, when the school's graduating class numbered only 45 students.

Lani Bader, who preceded her as dean, told Golden Gate's Class Action magazine upon her retirement that McKelvey's "energy, sense of humor and infectious love for the law captivated everyone, students and staff alike."

Ramey added in that publication, "No one did more to advance women, either in legal education or the practice of law, than Judy McKelvey."

[Return to Women Leaders in the Law hub page](#)



Copyright 2011. ALM Media Properties, LLC. All rights reserved.