



# FEDERAL BAR ASSOCIATION

## SOUTH FLORIDA CHAPTER

### *President's Message*



While we should recognize the amazing women in our community every month, March is Women's History Month. Our newsletter and diversity committee has lined up some great interviews that we will be sharing with you all month long. The first interview is with our new Clerk of Court, Angela Noble. While Ms. Noble is not new to the District, this may be the first opportunity that many of you have to learn a little bit more about her. We hope that you take this opportunity to meet her in print and make sure to say hello to her when you see her in person.

—David Weinstein

## *Angela E. Noble*

### *From Docket Clerk to Clerk of Court*

Ms. Noble's first day on the job was the beginning of the 2018 federal government shutdown. As the executive leader of over 150 federal employees in one of the busiest districts in the nation, Ms. Noble had to manage an impending crisis, with employees anxiously wondering if they would be getting their next paycheck and judges calling looking for answers — all while learning a new job.

Fortunately, Ms. Noble "thrives in crisis." Spend five minutes with her, and it's obvious why she's been entrusted with one of the most important roles in the courthouse. Wearing a bracelet that reads, "break the barriers," Ms. Noble is an open book about her life, upbringing, and the experiences that make her so loyal to the federal judiciary.



#### *What was your first job?*

When I was 15 years old I lied and said I was 16 so I could work at my favorite store in the mall. My mother was not happy. Later, during summers, I worked as a part-time receptionist at the Smithsonian in New York. My father was the facilities manager there, and it was important to him that I learn how to interact in a professional setting. Before he was a facilities manager, my dad was in the military and then he was a professional musician—he was a successful trumpet player. I grew up surrounded by famous Latin musicians, but I didn't know they were famous. My dad is 84 now, and he doesn't know

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who rapper Cardi B. is, but she sampled him for her song, *I Like It Like That!*. Those were the days before artist royalties. Though I share my father's love of music, it was not a career I wanted to follow. I did, however, follow his path of serving the government.

***Can you tell us about a defining moment in your life?***

My mom was the first person in our family to graduate from college, and she graduated when I was 10 years old. So while we lived in downtown Manhattan, I spent a lot of my time with my grandparents in East Harlem. I grew up in an environment where there was a distrust of the police, a feeling that they weren't there to protect us, but to disrupt our lives and to benefit the privileged. I'd sit in their kitchen window and watch drug sweeps in the courtyard.

But when I was about 8 years old, I had a defining moment. I heard my mom arguing with my grandfather. He had been robbed and pistol-whipped for his gold chain with a small medallion of the Virgin Mary. The chain was so thin and small it looked like it was made for a child. I didn't understand why someone would want it or take it. My mom explained, "they wanted it for drugs," and I just didn't understand. She had to break it down for me: they wanted to sell the chain to buy drugs. That's when I made the connection between those drug sweeps I watched—they weren't for my entertainment—and the danger drugs bring to a neighborhood. Those officers were trying to keep my community safe. That moment set me on a path to study criminal justice.

***Did you know any lawyers?***

I never knew or met a lawyer until college. Criminal justice wasn't a subject I was expected to study. Even when I was in college, I wasn't focused on going to law school. "You're not one of them," was always with me. I always had an interest in law, but based on my parents' wishes, I first studied architecture and then psychology. Ultimately, I followed my own path and decided

to study criminal justice, which was my true interest.

***How did you connect with the federal judiciary?***

My third year in college, I had an assignment that led me to visit a courthouse. A classmate was a Federal Protective Services officer and offered to take me to the federal courthouse in Manhattan where he worked. I was in awe when I walked into the rotunda. He introduced me to a docket clerk, who was so friendly and helpful to us. Later, while observing court, the judge noticed us and was so nice, sending us to a more exciting show-cause hearing in another courtroom. The whole experience affected me. I applied to be a docket clerk about a year later, but didn't get the job.

***What was your first job after college?***

I was a paralegal at the Brooklyn District Attorney's Office. I worked in the arrest-processing unit. At that time, many attorney positions had been downsized, and paralegals were being used a lot more. I worked the nightshift, from 4 p.m. until midnight. I found it to be the most exciting and interesting shift.

***Did you have a mentor there?***

I didn't have a formative mentoring relationship, but I learned a lot from observing the lawyers. At the time, I considered being an FBI agent and learned that many agents have law degrees. At the D.A.'s office, I would watch the lawyers, and I started realizing, "I think I could do that."

***Did you keep working when you started law school?***

I waited tables all through college and needed to work through law school too. Of course, the 4 p.m. to midnight shift wouldn't work with night school; I needed a 9-5 job. I applied again to be a federal docket clerk, and this time I got the job. I worked there throughout my four years in law school.

I would never have made it through law school

if it wasn't for that job and the people I met there. My second year of law school, the September 11th attack occurred. I worked in a federal building and went to school eight blocks away from Ground Zero. I thought about quitting every day, but I was committed to law school. Sometimes I'd cry at my desk, stress having got the best me, and my coworkers at the clerk's office would take my work and say, "Angela, it's 5:15, you need to leave. You'll be late for class." Even the judges would ask their law clerks to cover court so I could leave. I was so lucky to work with people like that. It's a big reason why I'm so loyal to the federal judiciary.

*You became a lawyer even though in college you thought, "I'm not one of them."*

I saw how my mom's education changed our lifestyle, and I wanted that too. My mom graduated with a computer science degree. She was one of the few female programmers in the 80s. It wasn't something she was passionate about, but she knew computers were the future, and this was a way to change our lives. She brought us into the middle class. Although she was very successful in her career, she made it clear that she wasn't terribly accepted in her field. She quit when I was 17. With a criminal justice degree, I knew I needed an advanced degree to move up. And unlike my mother, I had a passion for the work I was doing.

As an adult, I learned that my grandmother came to the U.S. when she was 20 years old, unmarried, and with her 4-year-old son, my father. She couldn't rent an apartment. She once paid a young African-American police officer \$100 to pretend to be her husband so she could rent an apartment in the Bronx. She had so many stories like that. I used to be very shy when I was young, but I grew up with my grandmother always saying, "Don't let anyone tell you that people like us don't or can't do anything."

*Justice Sotomayor and other prominent women have admitted to struggling with "imposter syndrome" - the feeling of not being good enough*

*despite career achievements or expertise. Have you experienced that?*

I saw Justice Sotomayor speak at the Palm Beach Bar Association, and she talked about this. She's at the pinnacle of her profession, she worked hard and earned her place, but she still has moments where she thinks to herself, "How the heck did I get here?" I have those moments. I often remind myself that I too earned my place. I may not always relate to some of the highly distinguished people around me, but I am where I belong. I easily relate to my staff, which makes me a good manager. Bridging the gap is what makes me a leader.

*What advice would you give to newer or younger lawyers?*

Don't be afraid to ask questions or to ask for feedback. And if you feel like you don't belong, let people see who you are. Don't hide.

*It can be hard to speak up when you are new or need work. How did you develop your confidence?*

I spent a lot of time trying to conform and that takes a lot of effort. Ultimately, it's not worth it. Right after law school, I worked in a place that criticized my accent, saying I wouldn't be taken seriously. They paid me a secretarial wage and justified it by reminding me that I had a husband. Depending on the client, I would be introduced by my Hispanic maiden name or my ex-husband's Jewish last name—even though I never took his name. Ultimately, it's important to pick your battles. Fight for the things worth fighting for. Let everything else go. I knew that was not my forever job. I learned what I could and moved on. Most importantly, I never burned any bridges.

I've been very lucky to work for people like Judge Middlebrooks, whose chambers was a wonderful environment. I also worked in Florida's Office of Attorney General, which was a great place to practice. I maintain good relationships everywhere I go. Knowing I've built a solid reputation keeps me confident.

Treating people fairly will take you a long way. Too many lawyers let their egos damage their reputations. Most never recover.

*Each Clerk of Court brings a different perspective to the role that impacts the culture of the courthouse and the lives of all the employees. What are you hoping to bring to the role?*

I want the employees here to have the same opportunities that I had. I'm the docket clerk who became Clerk of Court. Over the years, mid-level positions have been cut and salary

grades have changed. It's not as easy to work your way up. I want some new hopeful person to move up too.

Our Court is very efficient and I intend to keep it that way. As we continue to grow, it is important to keep our dedicated and talented staff motivated. I intend to do that by treating everyone as I was treated; by offering educational opportunities and paths to advancement, and most importantly, by treating everyone with kindness and respect.

— Sowmya Bharathi

## Upcoming Events



### Hyatt Luncheon – U.S. Magistrate Judge Lauren F. Louis.

On **March 12, 2019**, Judge Louis will be discussing *Playing it Safe? Implications of Over-Asserting the Attorney-Client Privilege*. Judge Louis, who filled the magistrate judge position vacated upon the retirement of Magistrate Judge William C. Turnoff, took the bench in 2018, after working as: a trial attorney at Boeis Schiller Flexner LLP in Fort Lauderdale; an Assistant U.S. Attorney in Miami; and a law clerk to Chief Judge K. Michael Moore. For CLE information and to reserve your spot, please visit <https://fba-sdfla.org/event/hyatt-luncheon-us-magistrate-judge-lauren-f-louis/>.

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