

## The Changing World For Women In Law

A Conversation With Recently Retired Partner, Brook Brown



In a profession not typical for a woman in the 1970s, Brook Brown was determined to find a firm in Austin where she could help clients solve their legal problems. Never mind that some firms in the day would not even interview women for legal positions and others already “had a token woman lawyer.” Brook was confident she would find a position in Austin where she could practice law. Her determination earned Brook 40 years of service to clients, steady work, fond memories, and relationships that have lasted a lifetime.

As the first female attorney hired at McGinnis Lochridge, Brook has certainly created a lasting legacy. Those who know Brook were saddened by the announcement of her retirement from the Firm at the end of 2016, but are honored to have had the opportunity to witness her unwavering devotion and enthusiasm for the legal profession.

**ML:** *As a college student at The University of Texas at Austin, how did you develop an interest in going to law school?*

**BB:** I was a government major in undergraduate school, thinking that I would get a teaching certification along with my degree, but soon realized that teaching was not the right path. At graduation, I was hired to be a secretary for a House Member in the Texas Legislature and became his Administrative Assistant. At his insistence, I took the LSAT exam, applied to the University of Texas School of Law, and was accepted into the Summer Class for 1973.

**ML:** *And how did you end up at McGinnis Lochridge?*

**BB:** While working at the Capital, I met several attorneys who lobbied for McGinnis Lochridge. Through those connections, I was invited to apply for a clerkship. As my law school graduation was approaching, I was asked to apply for an associate position. And after some initial hesitation about hiring a female lawyer, the Firm offered me an associate position. I have been here ever since.

**ML:** *How did it feel to be the first female attorney hired at McGinnis Lochridge?*

**BB:** It was a tremendous feeling – I had come to know the Firm and its uniquely collegial style of practice and wanted to be a part of that work and the Austin legal community. I knew that Austin offered the best environment at the time in Texas for a woman to develop a law practice, as we had a female district judge, a female mayor (Carole Keeton Rylander), and a number of women in the Texas Legislature.

**ML:** *How did you come to center your practice in telecommunications law?*

**BB:** When I started, associates were encouraged to work in a variety of practice areas. I worked on anything I could get my hands on. Also, in 1975, the Legislature passed the Public Utility Regulatory Act, regulating both electric and telecommunications utilities on a statewide basis. That same year, the Legislature also adopted the first state Administrative Practices Act, which applied trial-type procedures to state administrative agency decision-making. As the newest lawyer at the Firm, and with my background in government, I was given a number of assignments that dealt with these two significant changes in the law. The more I worked on matters for utility clients, the more I developed a passion for the work. So, what started as a necessity to address these new statutes became my life's work.

**ML:** *Why did you choose to stay at McGinnis Lochridge until retirement?*

**BB:** There is a collegiality that was instituted by our founding partners and continues today. The type of legal issues that we address for clients often cross traditional lines of legal practice and require that lawyers from our various practice groups join together to solve the issue. It is not unusual at this Firm that the problem may include a business issue that requires technical knowledge and/or a statutory change or change in an agency rule, or a regulatory permit or license, or litigation, or all of the above. Resolution requires a combination of talents to solve the issue, and for me, it's been a very rewarding practice.



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**ML:** *What advice do you have for younger lawyers who are thinking about a legal career?*

**BB:** Think about what you will do as a lawyer on a day-to-day basis - drafting a contract after a detailed one-on-one conversation with a client, helping a trade association draft a proposed rule after a day-long discussion among its members, identifying from many client interviews and witness statements that part of the evidence and exhibits that will best tell your client's story at trial, figuring out how you are going to structure your oral argument so that you get the court's attention to the problem your client faces - as these are the things lawyers actually do, so it is important to decide what area of law intrigues you and matches your talents. Find the area of practice that intrigues you and makes you excited to get up in the morning. When I began my practice, utility regulation was at the beginning of major innovation. For example, on the telecom side, we went from the rotary dial telephone (literally!) to the internet, and that change has been a source of constant interest for me. Others may love the intricacies of appellate law or the thrill of helping to structure and close a business deal.

**ML:** *Now that retirement is here, what will you do next?*

**BB:** I have given myself some time to see what new interests may bubble to the surface. I am excited about what that might be.

