

Alumni Profiles: Sheila Avrin McLean and David McLean



David McLean and Sheila Avrin McLean

About David

Current activities include:

- › BronxWorks, Board Chair
- › Eagle-Picher Settlement Trust, Trustee
- › Professional Asset Indemnity Ltd., Special Counsel, former Director

Former employment includes:

- › PricewaterhouseCoopers, LLP formerly Coopers & Lybrand, LLP General Counsel

Began legal career at:

- › Sullivan & Cromwell LLP

Graduate of:

- › Princeton University
- › Yale Law School

About Sheila

Current activities include:

- › Council on Foreign Relations, member
- › Academy for Educational Development, Director
- › International Foundation for Electoral Services, Director
- › Southern Africa Legal Services Foundation, Director

Former employment includes:

- › Boyden World Corp., Pres. & CEO
- › Association of Executive Search Consultants, Pres. & CEO
- › Institute of Int'l Education, VP
- › US International Development Cooperation Agency, GC
- › Ford Foundation, Assoc. GC

Began legal career at:

- › Cravath, Swaine & Moore LLP

Graduate of:

- › Smith College
- › Yale Law School

Q – What initially drew you to the Council of New York Law Associates?

Sheila – I was one of very few female associates at Cravath in 1971. Another was Carol Bellamy. Carol was one of the Council's founders and served on the Steering Committee as Treasurer. She introduced me and David to the organization. We were very active in Carol's state senate campaign (D – Brooklyn) and became Council members at that time.

Q – I've heard from Neal Johnston and others how young associates who were members of the Council and the City Bar upset the City Bar's Executive Committee vote in 1971. Would you tell me the story from your perspective?

David – We were living in Park Slope at the time. So were the Greens (Edward F. Greene, another Council founder, and his wife Dini) and others active in forming the Council.

Sheila – Matt Mallow, a Council member, told me that a group of associates wanted to run a renegade campaign to elect younger members and a woman (a first!) to the Executive Committee of the Association of the Bar of the City of New York. Elections were scheduled for the Stated Meeting but only attendees could vote. The meeting was preceded by what was then considered a very expensive dinner. Virtually no associates attended. But Matt and another associate, Michael Varet, a member of the Council's Coordinating Committee, read the bylaws and found that you could arrive after the dinner and still vote as long as you did so in person. Matt and Michael wanted to run for Executive Committee seats so they organized associates who were members of the City Bar. They were also looking for a woman who was a City Bar member to join them. There were very few of us in those days. I was home with a new baby and so exhausted, but I told them I would join them if they turned out the vote. With the Great Hall filled with associates and partners, we were elected in a landslide. I was hardly known in the Bar but I won what was then the largest plurality of votes in the City Bar's history because I was a woman and the times were ripe for change.

Q – What do you feel was the significance of that leadership change?

Sheila – One of the first actions we took on the Executive Committee was to eliminate the rule that you needed to be present to vote. For the next class, members could vote by paper ballot received in the mail. Changing the process of election was a first step toward diversifying the leadership for younger members, for women and for others as well. Associates were organizing and addressing pressing issues of the day. For example, during my four-year term on the Executive Committee, we created a committee whose only purpose was to consider legal issues confronting women.

David – The change gave young and non-establishment lawyers a voice in the City Bar's governance.

Q – How did you reconnect with Lawyers Alliance?

David – When I was general counsel of Coopers & Lybrand, I was approached by then Board Chair Mike Cook. Lawyers Alliance was looking to diversify the Board, comprised mostly of partners from large firms, with in-house general counsel. I joined the Board in 1999 and served as Treasurer from 2001 to 2005. Sheila and I have contributed annually and attended events ever since.

Sheila – These gatherings offer us a chance to catch up with old friends, and, for me, to connect with others interested in public service and to see the important work the organization is doing today.

This article is one of a series of profiles of the people who have helped to build Lawyers Alliance for New York since 1969.



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