



## How Has Being a Lawyer Made You a Better Mother?

BY KATHERINE JAMES & CONTRIBUTORS ANN B. OLDFATHER,  
MARIA BOYCE, KAREN BOYD, KATHI LUTTON,  
CARMEN S. POKLUDA & JUANITA BROOKS

When our wonderful team member, John Park, suggested we ask some of our clients and friends, “How has being a lawyer made you a better mother?” I thought, “Fantastic! What a great way to honor Mother’s Day!” As I contemplated my own journey of motherhood (and now grandmotherhood!) and the law this came to mind:

“Working with your cases and the law has made me a better mother because it has allowed me to teach my children that making a difference with whatever one does in life is a privilege.”

Ann Oldfather is a trial lawyer in Louisville, Kentucky. I had the good fortune to get to experience first-hand her brilliant and tender handling of a particularly vulnerable client witness. Her dedication to her clients and her children ring true in her glorious response:

“Being a lawyer AND a mother have presented me with two roles that combine synergistically—to advocate in one role and to nurture in the other. My children see me stick up for those who need an advocate, and they learn to care for others. My clients get to see the side of me that nurtures, and they know I care for them as individuals. And I get to work on issues that make the world fairer for all—including my own children and (perhaps) their children.

A psychology professor at college told us that the truly fortunate get their avocation for their vocation. I AM truly fortunate.”

Maria Boyce is a litigator with a huge heart, a ton of ambition, and sheer brilliance. I got to experience her handling the getting ready for trial at the same time she was needed at school for a major performance of one of her kids. Of course she pulled it off with grace and fortitude.

“Being a trial lawyer has helped me learn to stay focused on the relevant and not be distracted by the irrelevant. This skill has served me well in the wonderful world of parenting by focusing on what really matters in life as we lead our children into

Karen Boyd is great. An endless source of creativity and humor in the face of whatever is in front of the trial team. Well, her thoughts on being a lawyer and a mom sum her up to a “T”:

“Being a lawyer trains you to listen—to your clients, witnesses, judges, jurors. And not just to what is being said, but to what isn’t being said and what THAT means. There is no skill more valuable when dealing with teenagers.”

Kathi Lutton had me at “hello.” An amazing IP litigator, she balances motherhood and lawyering better than anyone I know. In the middle of the week we were working on a case that was going to trial - and she got up an hour early so that she could make cookies with her young kids since she knew she wasn’t getting home until after they would be in bed that night. Like that.

“As a lawyer, I’m only effective to the extent that I can see all sides of an issue and if I can see all aspects of an issue (including emotional or other non-linear or "rational" aspects). Applying that same thinking with my children has made me better be able to understand their points of view and the issues they face. Just because a kid's issue may seem "silly" to an adult, doesn't mean it is. And, what really matters is the kid's perception and how the issue is impacting him or her. I hope that by having that understanding, I'm better able to be there for my children. Relatedly, being a lawyer (especially while in firm management) also made it abundantly clear that we would have many fewer disputes if everyone took ownership of the reactions they cause/create. Instead of taking ownership, many try to justify their own actions and "blame" the other person/party for their response. "I don't know why he is so upset. All I said was, 'X'..." If instead we reflected on what we did that caused the reaction, took ownership and attempted to cure in the future, the world (and our kids) would be happier. I'd love to say that I'm a wonderful parent because I've instilled this concept in my children. Instead, all I can say is that we can only be the best parents we can by continuously trying to find ways to live a good life and model great lessons/values for our children and in their communities. We need to fight hard when that modeling seems to fail or when countervailing pressures disrupt our attempts. Stay the course, have an occasional cry and get back on the horse.”

Carmen S. Pokluda is one of those amazing lawyers who, although she doesn't try cases, loves being on litigation teams working behind the scenes. I feel like over the years I have come to know her and her "boys" as she knows mine - I love it when she cuts out early during a trial day to go to the Halloween Party at school, and comes back for more case work.

“A dear friend and former colleague once told me that she was a better mother

because she worked. I didn't fully appreciate the wisdom of her comment until I had my second child and thought I would be the perfect at-home mom. It turned out that having responsibilities outside the home gave me better perspective both at work and home. I have discovered that clients and co-workers are great resources of information/experiences (which makes me a better mom) and my children help me find clarity with pure, honest, unfiltered feedback (which makes me a better lawyer)... asked my 10 year-old if he thought I was a better mom because I am working lawyer and he said, "Yes, each case teaches you something new and the more you learn, the more you can teach us!" Happy Mother's Day to all moms – including working moms!"

Juanita Brooks is an amazing IP lawyer. She manages to try cases all the time AND mother all the time. I still don't know how she does it. I met her when we were teaching together - she is brilliant at it - and have had the pleasure to watch her try a case while her son was trying her at the same time. Wowser.

"I think/hope that I've been a role model for both my son and daughter, showing them that anything is possible if you set your mind to it."

Happy Mother's Day!

~ Katherine