Mary Cranston

Mary Cranston began working at Pillsbury Winthrop in San Francisco directly after graduating from Stanford Law School. She was one of the first women in the firm’s litigation department, and the first woman litigator to become partner. When she was head of litigation, a new methodology was adopted for selecting firm leaders. The new system allowed senior partners and departmental officers to pick someone they thought would have a change agenda and consensus building skills. Ms. Cranston got the job and became the first woman to lead an AM LAW 100 law firm.

As head of Pillsbury Winthrop, Ms. Cranston sets the strategic agenda and is closely involved in efforts to increase diversity in the firm. She says that her job is “to ensure that Pillsbury Winthrop is a great place to work for everyone.” Under her leadership, not only did the firm thrive, but her efforts to create an environment friendly to women resulted in the firm having a much larger percentage of women lawyers than other law firms, large and small, and throughout the nation. The National Law Journal named Cranston one of the 100 most influential lawyers in the United States.

Prior to taking the lead in her firm, Ms. Cranston led initiatives in San Francisco law firms in the late 1970s and early 1980s to promote gender friendly policies such as maternity leave and part-time schedules. She was on the front line in the fight against discriminatory clubs in San Francisco in the mid-1980s. In 1989, she co-chaired a task force set up by the California Commission on Women to survey the policies and practices of California law firms and the impact of those policies and practices on women. The report of the task force was instrumental in accelerating the adoption of family friendly and gender-neutral programs in California law firms. In 2001-2002, she chaired the “No Glass Ceiling Task Force” of the San Francisco Bar Association, a blue ribbon task force that produced six best practices for the promotion of women to leadership in law firms. The initiative received nationwide press coverage, and other bar associations followed suit.

Outside of her work in the legal arena, Ms. Cranston has for many years volunteered for high school and university mentoring programs for young women seeking guidance about their careers and their lives. She takes under her wing about three or four young people every year. She believes that a person’s self-picture about where she is headed is the single biggest determinant of where she will end up in life.

Ms. Cranston is a Fellow of the American College of Trial Lawyers. She is one of five trial lawyers in San Francisco highly recommended by Global Counsel 3000. She was a council member and officer of the ABA Antitrust Section, and a member of the American Law Institute. She has been named one of “The 50 Most Influential Business Women in the Bay Area” by the San Francisco Business Times List 1999-2005, one of the Best Law Firm Leaders in the United States by Of Counsel’s Best of Law Firm Leaders List in October 2002, and was the recipient of the 2004 Athena Award for professional accomplishments and community service, specially noted for mentoring others and providing a role model to encourage women to achieve their full leadership potential.

Ms. Cranston has been single-mindedly devoted to the advancement of women from the outset of her career. Her track record in promoting women behind her as she progressed in leadership in her firm speaks for itself.

Carolyn Dineen King

Carolyn Dineen King Mary Cranston

Carolyn Dineen King is the daughter of two lawyers, the sister of two lawyers, the wife of a federal judge, and the mother of a law student. In 1959, she graduated summa cum Laude from Smith College with a plan to get a Ph.D in philosophy and to teach, however, she concluded that a lifetime with philosophers wouldn’t work, and she enrolled in the Yale Law School. In 1961, she worked in the summer honors program at the Department of Justice, and discovered that lawyering was her passion.

Judge King graduated from Yale in 1962 and moved to Houston. She received an exemplary reference from the chief of the Tax Division in the Department of Justice. But the United States Attorney in Houston turned her down for employment, cheerfully confessing that he was not up to hiring a woman. Later that year, Fulbright & Jaworski made an offer to hire Judge King, but it took some negotiating on her part to obtain the same starting salary as the men. She spent ten years at Fulbright, gaining a reputation as an exceptional corporate securities lawyer. The firm, however, was not yet ready to make her a partner, and Judge King moved on to another firm. Happily, Fulbright later made her a partnership offer, but by then she had found another calling.

In 1979, Judge King was approached by the head of the Merit Selection Committee appointed by President Carter to find judges for the Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit. The President was looking for a woman from the western half of the Circuit. As a securities lawyer, Judge King had no interest in being on a court and initially declined the invitation to apply. In addition, she was a Republican. The President did not care about her party affiliation. What mattered to him was that she was a good lawyer and a woman—the very quality that had previously been such a liability to progress for her. Judge King’s commitment to public service eventually won out, and she applied for the position. Shortly thereafter, Judge King became the second woman to sit on the Fifth Circuit. In 1999, she became the Fifth Circuit’s first female Chief Judge, and in 2002, at the request of Chief Justice Rehnquist, she became the first woman to chair the Executive Committee of the Judicial Conference of the United States.

Judge King is a brilliant, prolific jurist, having authored more than 4,400 opinions in her twenty-six years on the bench. As Chief Judge, she has addressed the needs of the Southwest border courts by obtaining new judgeships and other resources to handle the overload of criminal cases. In her role as Chairman of the Executive Committee, Judge King took the lead in developing a major cost containment strategy to enable the federal courts to cope with shrinking appropriations.

Judge King is a member of the Council of the American Law Institute. She has spent her entire life involved in human services, educational and cultural organizations. For many years, she was a member of the Board of Trustees and the Management Committee of the United Way and served as chief financial officer. She chaired the Board of Trustees of the University of Saint Thomas and served on the Board of Trustees of one of Houston’s largest hospitals.

Hundreds of women are beneficiaries of Judge King’s leadership and inclusive decision-making style. More than half of her law clerks since 1979 have been women. She actively encourages women to apply for judicial positions and includes women judges in key positions of leadership. She also counsels women professionals on balancing work and family. Judge King’s story is one of pioneering, perseverance and commitment.