

HONORABLE SHIRLEYS. ABRAHAMSON

Justice, Wisconsin Supreme Court
Madison, Wisconsin



Despite a brilliant career which spans private practice, academia, and the judiciary, Justice Shirley Abrahamson has never lost her down-to-earth essence—her humanity. Speaking of her experience as a Wisconsin Supreme Court Justice, she said, “It’s very important to remember...all the cases that come here are people cases...It’s not just a number or a legal issue, it’s human beings.”

Before her appointment to the bench in 1976, Justice Abrahamson was a star in private practice as the first female practitioner, later the first female partner, and the first female named partner in a private law firm in the Madison area. She was also the first woman to gain tenure at the University of Wisconsin Law School where she still teaches and actively supports women law students and new women lawyers in their careers. According to Judge Patricia Wald, a 1994 Brent Award recipient, Justice Abrahamson, “has urged the next generation of young women lawyers on, advocated life on the bench but always with the wry and candid approach which does not blink at wrongs not yet fully righted, but with the zest of one willing to take them on.”

As the first woman to serve on the

Wisconsin State Supreme Court, she has been in the forefront on issues that advance fairness for women throughout the justice system, such as recognizing the importance of non-monetary contributions to the family in setting maintenance

payments and expanding individual rights under the state constitution.

Justice Abrahamson embodies the notion of the lawyer as stateswoman. She is a generous participant in bar commissions and committees, and a tireless speaker to community groups and nonlegal professionals. She is a member of the Court Reform Advisory Panel for the International Human Rights Law Group Cambodia Project and of the Advisory Board of the Central and East European Law Initiative (CEELI) of the ABA Section of International Law and Practice. In 1993, she served as a consultant to the United States Agency for International Development Rule of Law Project in Moscow.

Justice Abrahamson earned her A.B. from New York University (1953), her J.D. from Indiana University (1956) and her S.J.D. from the University of Wisconsin (1962). She and her husband, Seymour Abrahamson, have one son.