



Phyllis Gottesfeld Knight

Phyllis Gottesfeld Knight recently achieved status as a CBA HonorLife member. She joins a small but distinguished group of Colorado attorneys who have practiced law for 50+ years.

PROFILE

Hometown:

Denver, Colorado

Law School:

University of Colorado
School of Law

Lives in:

Denver, Colorado

Works at:

I'm working at retiring!

Practice Area(s):

Wills and trusts currently,
but lots of litigation formerly

CBA Member Since:

1969

Why did you become a lawyer?

A college political science class required research about a local government entity. I chose to study the Denver Board of Water Commissioners and became interested in its varied work. The Commissioners were then in the process of building the Dillon Dam. This led me to the wider questions of water and mineral allocation and to law school, although later events encouraged me to practice in other fields.

Best advice you've been given:

Don't assume criticism is personal.

Favorite memory from law school:

Working with talented team members to win the Rothgerber Moot Court Medal. I was the first woman to serve on the winning team. One of the panel judges was Colorado's former Chief Justice Edward Pringle. I was both terrified and thrilled to argue a portion of our team's case.

Favorite Colorado escape:

I venture quite often to the beautiful Spanish Peaks area; at other times it's great to drive onto the Eastern Plains. There are fewer ranches now, and the prairie is returning to the condition it was in when pioneers first tramped across it; in some places you can even walk in the wagon-train ruts. You can almost always find something of interest in small towns. The railroad museum in Limon is a quick stop—the last train departed for Denver in 1966, the year I graduated from college.

Outside of law, what are your hobbies?

Literature and history seminars, supporting the teaching of writing and literature (e.g., Lighthouse Writers in Denver and Writing the Rockies at Western Colorado University in Gunnison). I also


enjoy attending Central City Opera in the summer, Opera Colorado, and especially The Met Opera live stream movies in the winter. Where else can you wear jeans and bring a brown-bag lunch to an opera?

On my desk right now:

I've stacks of files to close and cases to wrap up as I lurch toward retirement. There's also a remarkable book called *Go, Went, Gone*, a sensitive study of the current African immigration to Western Europe and the responses that immigration engenders. On top of the stack are travel itineraries to visit children, grandchildren, and college classmates.

One of the most positive experiences you've had as a lawyer:

As a young lawyer practicing in California, I found myself struggling to communicate with the judge during my first jury trial. For example, he refused my requests to cross-examine, yet he invited opposing counsel to do so, and he denied all of my objections. I didn't know what to do or why it was happening. During a break, the judge, counsel, and the court reporter gathered in chambers. Suddenly the court reporter spoke up: "Your honor, you are refusing counsel the opportunity to cross-examine and you always do that when there is a woman in your courtroom." Her statement visibly shocked the judge, who blurted out, "Do I really do that?" She said, "Yes, you do." She worked with that judge every day and her job was probably on the line, but she said what she had to say anyway.

I'm proud to report that nothing like this has ever happened to me in a Colorado courtroom, but the experience taught me that prejudice is seldom recognized by those holding biased opinions, and may not be recognized by those subject to the bias. It also taught me that courage exists among so many. 

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