

Suzie S. Thorn
Pro Bono Committee History Project

I was admitted to the AAML as a Fellow in 1975 (sometimes it took a year for the national organization to act after someone was approved by the local chapter). At that time, there were very few women and no welcome dinners or newcomers' dinners, so I sought out the few other friendly female faces in Chicago.

Positions held over the years:

Involvement in AAML National Foundation since 1991-2 as a charter member.

AAML Norcal Chapter President- 1982*

AAML Norcal Chapter Treasurer – Late 70's*

AAML National Foundation President – 2005-2007

AAML National Foundation Treasurer

National Gender Bias Committee, 1991.

National Puerto Rico and Marketing Committee, 1995).

Suzie S. Thorn Family Foundation President – 1995-present

International Academy of Family Lawyers Fellow – 1992-present

- In 1980-1981, I was the Chair of the State Bar Family Law Section - only the second female to hold that position.

- What inspired you to go into family law?

At Hastings, there were only three women in my class, one of them only lasted three months. I faced a lot of skepticism – nobody wanted to talk to me until they realized I could probably help them with their grades. Nobody wanted to hire me as a lawyer. I went to work with my father, Esmond Schapiro, in 1961. At that time, everybody wanted free family law help. As a woman, they expected the work to be free. It was work I could get and I found that I liked it and had some talent. If I had grown up in a more 'enlightened' time, I might have chosen a different path, maybe a career in mathematics or economics, but I think things have turned out pretty well, all things considered.

- What do you most enjoy?

The constant surprises and the challenges presented by the facts and the parties. When I first started, Judges would ask me where my attorney was. Nowadays, most know who I am, or at least know my name.

“Ms. Thorn's international skills distinguish her ability to represent clients with cases involving the international Hague Convention for return of children wrongfully abducted or retained outside of their habitual residence. Similarly, she has particular interest in cases involving the Uniform Child Custody Jurisdiction Enforcement Act (UCCJEA) providing enforcement for interstate child custody determination and orders.” Suzie Thorn was one of the first lawyers to recognize the international aspects of family law.

- What do you not enjoy?

Fee collection. Going to public courts.

- There is a long list of AAML Fellows who have worked in my office over the years: Susan Teller (Oregon Fellow), Ruth Miller (Reimer), Pam Pierson, Lori Nachlis, David Fink, Gretchen Wallacker, Carol Salvagione, Yasmine S. Mehmet.

- In the early 80's, I was listed in the Chronicle's version of best lawyers and, of all the lawyers listed, there was only me and another estate planner who were the only people that were not white males.

- When I was the treasurer of Norcal in the late 70's, I had the original idea to pay one fee as dues to AAML Norcal to cover all meals for the year. That idea continues to the current date and avoids all of the little battles about how much people were eating or whether they were attending each meeting.

- I recall an amusing incident being in a hearing in front of Justice Don King and being accused by Melvin Belli in open court of sleeping with Justice King. Mr. Belli, the “King of Torts”, was removed from the courtroom by the bailiff. Mr. Belli made a lot of unsavory comments about me during that high-profile case, most likely a sign that I was getting under his skin. At the end of that case, my client fled to Romania, bill unpaid.

*Uncertain of year