

Two Views On A Changing Profession

1964 Valedictorian

Rewards For A Long Struggle

Commack attorney Susan Lebow was valedictorian of her 1964 Brooklyn College Law School class.

For most young lawyers of the period, the distinction was a sure-fire path to success . . . except, of course, if you were a woman.

"The vistas were definitely different from those that women have now," she says. "Law firms did not encourage women to go into litigation or to have contact with the clients. They tucked us away in the research departments, investigating estates and trust cases."

That times have changed Mrs. LeBow can attest. The valedictorian of the Class of 1964 has just been named a partner in the firm of Sarisohn, Sarisohn, Carner, Thieman, Steindler and LeBow. "As far as we know, I'm the first woman in Suffolk to become a partner in a firm the size of ours," she says.

"Being named a partner is an expressing by my fellow professionals about the calibre of my work, a recognition of my contribution and value to the firm and it's nice to get the recognition of my peers."

Being named a partner is also important to Mrs. LeBow as a woman.

"I've been contacted by a lot of women who were very excited about it. It has meant to them that women can be dealt with on an equal footing and it's nice to have a woman "make it" in this male dominated profession.

Mrs. LeBow's first job was with the Port Authority of New York's legal department. She had to research court cases and prepare appeals briefs. Later she was transferred into the contracts division which gave her more exposure since she worked with construction firms under contract to the Authority.

In 1970, she and her husband, both native Brooklynites, left New York City and bought a house in Commack. Three years later she joined the firm of Floyd Sarisohn, former Democratic Party leader in Smithtown.

"I wanted to get closer to the people in my community and general practice with its diversity of cases was more fulfilling than my previous work. I've had an opportunity to do real estate, civil and criminal law which I never had the opportunity to do before and I couldn't go back to a library now."

The firm has also allowed her to pursue her interests in the community, and she adds "frankly if I couldn't

have pursued my interests I wouldn't have stayed." She is currently legal counsel for the Huntington Chapter of NOW (the National Organization for Women) and is also actively working on the Chapter's push for day care centers. Ms. LeBow participated in the establishment of VIBES, the Victims Information Bureau of Suffolk and a one-year program in 1975 for gifted children in the Half Hollow Hills school district. VIBES was set up to aid battered women.

She has also managed to raise four children, two boys, 12 and 8, and a set of six-year-old twin girls. Raising has entailed a "continuous juggling act" between the responsibilities to her work and to her children, she said and crucial to its success has been having a good housekeeper. "I've been very lucky. We've always been able to find a loving and compassionate individual who has been more concerned about the welfare of the children than whether the beds were made."

Her children, she feels, have an image of a doing mom. "Just recently my daughter told me she wanted to become a lawyer." Mrs. LeBow says with pride. The product of an equally supportive family environment, she

recalls that her parents "were both involved in education and they encouraged me to pursue my intellectual interests. As children we were exposed to literature, the arts and to music. I grew up instinctively feeling I had the right to realize my abilities to lead a self-fulfilling life. At that time there was no label for it but I guess you could say I had consciousness."

At first she sought a career in the theatre, as a dancer. But by the time she reached college she made the decision to abandon her dancing aspirations. "The life of a hooper is a rough one and in the long run I knew it wasn't the kind of life I wanted."

Deeply committed to the feminist movement, she sees the question of self-fulfillment epitomized in NOW. "It's not an organization that is looking to break up marriages. It addresses itself to those who are not content. It disturbs me when I see frustrated women who have not utilized their talents. Men and women have a right to realize themselves, and I want to help women find themselves." She hastened to add that she is not disparaging the work of housewives. What matters is that the woman finds the work rewarding.