

LADY JUSTICE IN THE BRONX

By Debralee Santos

In on our ongoing series, “A User’s Guide,” on the Bronx judiciary and the myriad ways it serves the borough’s residents, we have recently chosen to take a closer look at the Bronx Civil Supreme Court and the professionals who dwell, practice and work within its chambers.

The following is an expansion of our initial examination of the Civil Supreme division. We sit with two distinguished jurists, both Bronx natives and both seasoned, veteran lawyers and judges, who serve as exemplars of the remarkable professionals on and off the bench who daily serve the people of the Bronx to ensure that their rights and interests are safeguarded.

That they are both female is indicative of the great strides made by women in recent history in the pursuit of professional and intellectual excellence.

The personification of justice is often depicted as a matron carrying a sword and scales and wearing a blindfold, and this modern icon frequently adorns courtrooms and courthouses. The female goddess Justitia, she is a combination of the attributes of several deities: the blindfolded Fortuna (luck) with Hellenistic Greek (Tyche) and the sword-carrying Nemesis (vengeance).

She is Lady Justice.

Meet two such figures in the Bronx who wield their intellect and judgment as deftly as any such epic model.

La Tia Martin

Hon. La Tia Martin takes the practice of mockery quite seriously.

Mock trials, that is, or any such exercises of the sort, that afford young students, particularly women, the opportunity to engage in simulated courtroom experiences.

“I want to expose them to a career in law, but more importantly, I want to help them develop the skills to become mature young ladies,” says Judge Martin.

So seriously, in fact, that Judge Martin has founded a Summer Justice Academy for Young Women at Pace University, where area exceptional female high school students, mostly minorities, with an express interest in a career in law are immersed in an intensive program with other judges, lawyers and law professors as instructors.

In its inaugural year in 2009, the Summer Justice Academy had 25 students, and 32 students in 2010. Judge Martin fully expects that the Academy will have 50 graduates at the end of the summer in 2011.

The young women are expected to work hard.

The coursework includes an introductory but thorough curriculum in family, environmental, and health law, as well as contracts, research and writing, among other legal topics.

They must attend every day, fully participate in class, and submit a comprehensive legal paper that culminates

a course-long research project for review. For their hard work, they are rewarded with a certificate of completion, a modest stipend and other awards, which have included Yankees game tickets.

“We tell them there are no boundaries if they study hard and pursue whatever their dream is,” explains Judge Martin. “The sky’s the limit.”

The Bronx Civil Supreme Court justice would know.

A child of the Gun Hill Road projects, Judge Martin attended Immaculate Conception grammar school and later Mother Butler Memorial High School, where she studied hard and dreamt big.

She was a quick study. “I learned, among other things, that honesty and integrity were vital attributes.”

She went on to obtain her BS from Boston University and her JD from Rutgers University. Appointed by Mayor Rudolph Giuliani to the Supreme Court bench in 1999, Judge Martin previously served as a Judge in Civil Court and Criminal Court in New York.

Prior to her appointment, Judge Martin was General Counsel to the New York City Office of the Sheriff as Inspector General of the New York City Department of Finance, Tax Commission, Financial Information Services Agency and Office of Payroll as well as Assistant District Attorney in the Bronx County District Attorney’s Office.

Throughout Judge Martin’s extensive career runs a distinct undercurrent of concern for the issues of specific relevance to women. Her work, on and off the bench, has brought her, quite often, to where the law and the interests and rights of women converge.

As a Civil Court judge, Judge Martin heard domestic violence cases involving many first time offenders. Aided by the enactment of the Violence Against Women Act of 1994 (VAWA ‘94), which was signed into law by President Clinton as part of the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994, it was the first comprehensive package of legislation designed to prevent violent acts against women.

It provided \$1.6 billion to enhance investigation and prosecuting of violent crime perpetrated against women, increased pre-trial detention of the accused, imposed automatic and mandatory restitution on those convicted, and allowed civil redress in cases prosecutors chose to leave unprosecuted.

The National Organization of Women described the bill at its signing as “the greatest breakthrough in civil rights for women in nearly two decades.”

For Judge Martin, this “unmatched opportunity” meant that the plague of domestic violence could be addressed with widespread resources on a local level that had previously been lacking. She presided over the first dedicated domestic violence criminal court, which subsequently became the model for the City of New York.

As statistics indicate, domestic violence tends to be concentrated in densely populated, urban areas such as the Bronx, and there can be a cycle wherein an incident of violence is followed by much contrition and a showering of affection and gifts. It can take upwards of 25 such incidents of violence, notes Judge

Martin, before the victim will “wake up” and realize that the sequence of events is unlikely to change.

“It was tough,” admits Judge Martin of her time hearing such cases. “These were instances, often, where there was a lot of shock and sadness.”

With many cases before her of couples that had been involved for many years, and where children were involved, these additional resources were needed – and were used.

“The cases were adjudicated uniformly, and services were provided to both the complainants and the defendants.”

It allowed for many unique measures for first time offenders with deep roots in the community and a demonstrable willingness to undergo treatment, including ongoing counseling and therapy with social workers and other such evaluations.

Judge Martin’s present work on the Civil Supreme Court focuses largely on matrimonial cases, “a unique and difficult assignment”, where matters are resolved in a number of ways that range from amicable settlements to contentious disputes.

She laughs as she recounts the many instances in which she has been called upon to handle seemingly mundane matters that have become magnified through the lens of acrimony or even nostalgic memory.

But Judge Martin always seeks to bring the broader view to bear.

“I encourage the parties to resolve the cases among themselves [as much as possible]. The outcome...will affect their lives and those of their children.”

Judge Martin is tireless in her support of a more diverse legal and judicial system. Along with the Summer Justice Academy, Judge Martin has also served as President of the National Association of Women Judges (NAWJ), and during her tenure, applauded the nomination of the Honorable Justice Sonia Sotomayor, a fellow Bronx native, to the land’s highest court. She was present at the formal investiture ceremony on September 9, 2009 in Washington, D.C., to witness the historic event with President Obama, Vice President Biden and many others.

She is, undoubtedly, a jurist who has worked hard at sustaining a thoroughly democratic environment in her courtrooms. And she is also a thoughtful and dynamic role model who has taken to heart the unofficial credo of “work hard, dream big” of another hardworking thinker, she late of Ballynunnery, Ireland.

Mother Marie Joseph Butler, the Irish nun to whom Judge Martin’s high school alma mater is dedicated and whose philosophy served as the school’s ethos, was a remarkable leader who devoted herself to the education and development of young, bright, and independent-minded young women who could, simply, change the world.

Shortly after entering into the Convent of the Sacred Heart of Mary in France in 1876, the young nun was dispatched to head the order’s school in Sag Harbor. She took the challenge to heart, and went on to open colleges for young women in

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Rome, Paris, New York, and California.

Judge La Tia Martin has certainly taken heed in blazing her own trail.

Mother Butler would be proud of her young Gun Hill charge.

Wilma Guzmán

PING.

The word alone can conjure up, depending on whom you speak with, the most successful golf putter in history (see Karsten Solheim), an iTunes social network (see Steve Jobs), the fourth best new American restaurant as found in Portland, Oregon (see average GQ magazine reader), or a Person in Need of Guardianship (P.I.N.G.).

See Judge Wilma Guzmán.

And when you do, make certain you pronounce her name properly. Guzmán.

There is an accent there.

She says her surname, correctly, and as pleasantly and as firmly as she sustains and overrules objections in her courtroom, where all, from prospective jurors to lawyers to clerks to court officers, are well advised to come prepared to work, as she does.

"No reading the newspaper," she says, with a smile, sweetly.

For Judge Guzmán, Bronx Civil Supreme Court Justice since 2005, the work ethic is a way of life.

It is how the then-single mother of two young girls, who also worked full time as a legal secretary, decided that attending law school at night at St. John's University was feasible.

But what else could this Bronx native who knew at the age of 10 she wanted a career in the law be expected to do?

It was at that early age that she and her brother discovered that their elderly neighbor at Elsmere Place, with whom all her family had been friendly, had unexpectedly passed away, alone at home. They soon found out that he had no next of kin or relatives.

Judge Guzmán remembers distinctly the degree to which the ensuing forensic and legal follow-up surrounding her neighbor's death intrigued her, and how it seemed that a service by law enforcement and others was being provided, in light of his passing, despite the absence of family or friends.

"He was alone, but not totally," she muses pensively.

Perhaps then it is not altogether surprising to find that Judge Guzmán spends a great deal of time these days deliberating as thoughtfully and diligently on many such matters where the interests of persons whose autonomous capacity to make decisions regarding their health or property is diminished or altogether wanting such that the intervention of the court is considered necessary.

As Supreme Court judge, Judge Guzmán hears all trials: medical malpractice, automobile accidents, motions, infant compromises (settlement conferences for any person not yet 18 years of age), to name a few.

But she is clear, regardless of the kind of case, of how it will be heard and decided, always: "Reasonable, adequate, and fair."

It is what she wants for all involved.

Whether the case before Judge Guzmán

deals with a fifteen-year-old girl whose leg fracture is so severe and enduring that she laments of never being able to wear heels, or another young boy whose childhood accident had left him with shorn fingers for which he is taunted continually and which he attempts to hide with gloves, the former trial attorney is keen on finding equitable resolution that speaks to a long-term view of justice.

When Supreme Court, Civil Division?

All non-criminal suits are handled by the Bronx Civil Court and the Bronx Supreme Civil Court.

Civil Court decides lawsuits involving claims for damages up to \$25,000, and includes a small claims part for cases involving amounts up to \$5,000 as well as a housing part for landlord-tenant matters.

Supreme Civil Court handles the following selected list of claims:

Damages of more than \$25,000 involving:

- Serious personal injury cases
- Automobile injury cases
- Malpractice cases
- Injuries in industrial settings
- Commercial disputes
- Foreclosures

All Matrimonial matters, including:

- Divorce
- Claims of Support
- Equitable Distribution

Claims against the City of New York, including:

- Serious injuries on city property
- Police brutality claims
- Prisoners' claims

Equitable Powers Claims

- (Typically involving commercial claimants)
- Injunction to maintain status quo between litigants
- Temporary Restraining Order

How do I bring a claim (civil action)?

Generally, you may commence a civil action in Supreme Court to obtain money damages over \$25,000 or some other form of relief from a private person or entity (i.e., a corporation) whose actions have resulted in a violation of your rights. The action is commenced when the

party alleging harm (plaintiff) files either a summons and complaint, or a summons with notice with the court. The summons invokes the jurisdiction of the court and provides notice to the alleged wrongdoer (defendant) of the reason why he is being sued. Every lawsuit must be brought within one of the various deadlines spelled out in the law, which are known as statutes of limitations. Accordingly, the summons MUST be served with either a complaint or a summons with notice. They are known as initiating papers.

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What will be my compensation (relief)?

The court has the authority to grant many different forms of relief. The court can order a defendant to pay a sum of money, called damages, to the plaintiff to compensate for any injuries sustained. The court can also provide injunctive relief by ordering the defendant to act or refrain from acting in a particular way. In an action seeking a declaratory relief, the court determines the rights of each party in a dispute.

Please note your best course of action when considering legal action or when a claim is made against you is always to seek appropriate professional legal counsel or aid, which can be provided you by the court system through their referral services. Representation by a qualified legal professional affords you the best opportunity to have your case heard and decided fairly.

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For more information:

Bronx County Supreme Court, Civil Matters
851 Grand Concourse, The Bronx, New York 10451
718 618 1200
www.nycourts.gov/courts/12jd/civil/civil.shtml

"For many of them, this is a one shot deal. This is it," she explains about the many persons, young and old, for whom the courts act as a safeguard against predatory interests or undue damage.

Judge Guzmán cites many cases, noted as Article 81's, the procedure to be followed when someone is to be appointed for guardianship, in which the elderly involved have suffered from a diminished capacity to make reasonable choices for themselves.

These can be complicated and sometimes contentious issues, given the family dynamics involved.

It is her wish that more families would

disarray [from not talking] is worse."

"And get it in writing," she adds, quickly.

Guzmán has seen enough to know.

She is a seasoned jurist, having spent eight years as a Civil Court judge, where she heard cases in Small Claims Court that reinforced her sharp instincts.

"You get everything," she said.

Judge Guzmán laughs as she recalls cases in which there were claims that seemed to defy logic (the mega-store that was accused of breaking into people's homes to steal their pants in the dead of night, only to replace them with different-sized pants, for example), but that were all

heard, without fail, and often concluded with a trademark response.

"Decision reserved."

Judge Guzmán explains that the phrase was simple "Judge School 101", a basic premise that meant that you simply withheld unnecessary comment. You would need only to hear the merits of the case, inquire for further information as needed, and then conclude with "Decision reserved". You could issue your final decision after retiring to chambers.

"You're dealing with people's emotions. Battles have been had, people are upset... They just want to be heard," she said.

Judge Guzmán has always been mindful that paying attention and committing to hard work is what will often make all the difference.

After all, prior to working a full-time job as a paralegal to support her family while earning her law degree at night, she spent six years attending evening classes at John Jay, finally earning her BS in criminal justice in 1978.

In case you were counting, and you should be, that is a decade's worth of education, culled together with grit and sacrifice. After graduation, Judge Guzmán worked as an investigator with the Sex Crimes Unit at the Kings County District Attorney's office and in the private sector before returning to school for her St. John's law degree.

That led her to a career as a civil litigation-personal injury trial lawyer in Manhattan, forging ahead in a profession with few Latinos and even fewer Latinas. She became a member of the "Million Dollar Advocates Forum," a nationwide association of trial attorneys who achieved verdicts of \$1 million or more.

In 1999, she was elected a Civil Court judge, and in 2005, won election to her present 14-year term on the Bronx Supreme Court. She is now the proud mother of three adult children and grandchildren, and serves as a mentor and role model to the countless interns and students she has taught and nurtured in her chambers and as adjunct professor in paralegal studies at the Office of Continuing Education and Professional Studies at John Jay.

Discipline and focus.

"As a judge, you have to have the ability to listen to all sides... you have to listen."

She is not swayed by undue emotion or upset, and her equanimity is contagious.

By and large, her small circle of staff has been with her since she became Supreme Court judge, and they are widely regarded as close-knit and serious.

During a recent trial hearing, in which a doctor's testimony as to the mental capacity of an accident victim was being heard, Judge Guzmán listened attentively while her clerks and court officers did the same. Lawyers were clearly engaged and responded promptly and fully to her inquiries, knowing she would not entertain much else.

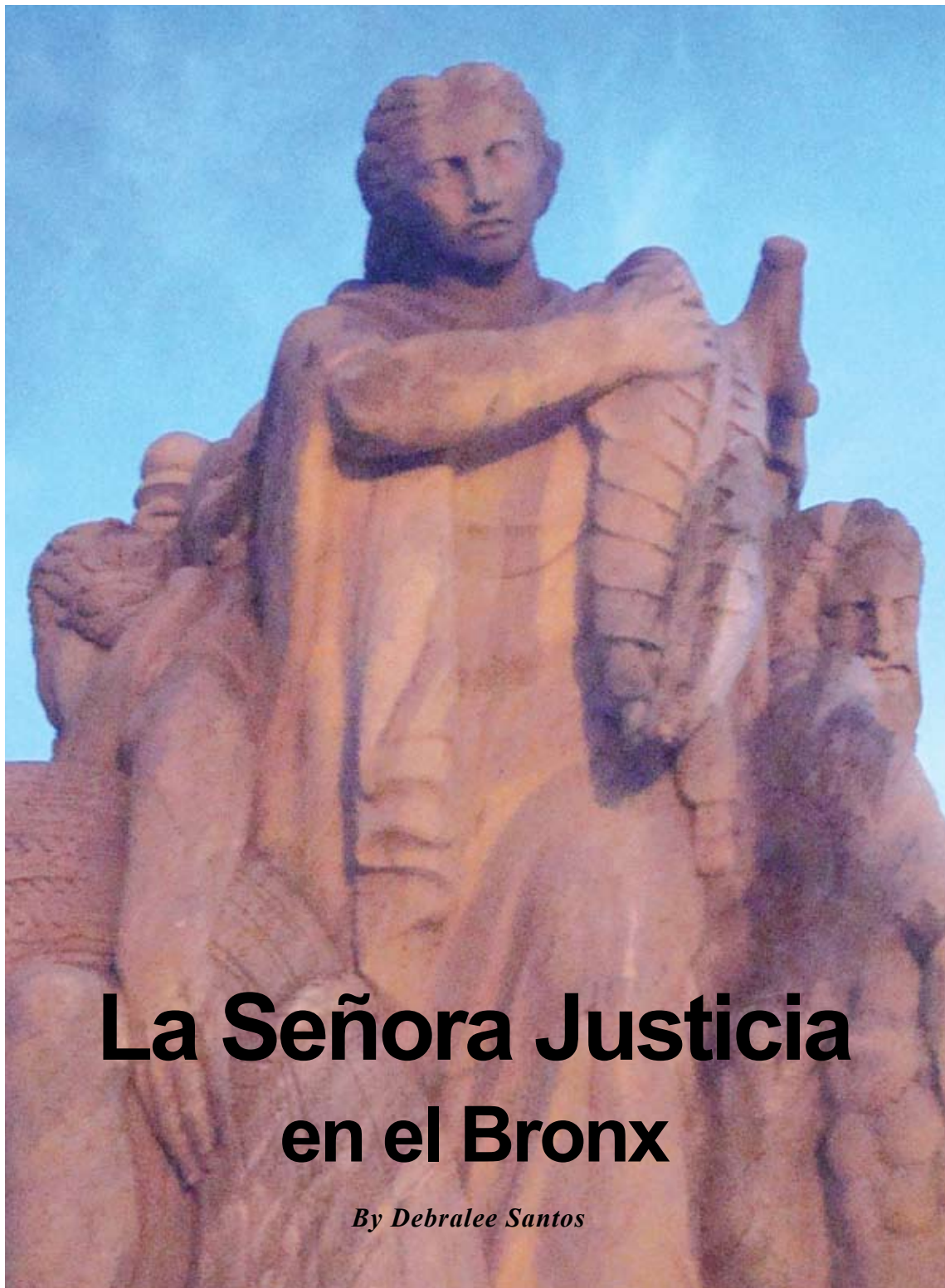
When one fellow dared presume that a day of trial would be lost to imminent holiday fatigue, she corrected him.

Sweetly, and firmly.

"I'll be working. We'll all be working. Don't presume, counselor," Judge Guzmán said.

Guzmán.

There is an accent there.



La Señora Justicia en el Bronx

By Debralee Santos

En nuestra serie, "Guía del Usuario," sobre los tribunales del Bronx y las maneras innumerables que sirven a los residentes del condado, hemos elegido recientemente echar una ojeada más cercana al Tribunal Supremo Civil y los profesionales que moran, practican y trabajan dentro de sus compartimientos.

Lo que sigue es una extensión de nuestra discusión inicial de la división Suprema Civil. Nos sentamos con dos jueces distinguidos, ambos naturales de Bronx y ambos abogados y jueces veteranos que sirven como ejemplares de los profesionales notables que a diario sirven la gente del Bronx para asegurarse de que sus derechos e intereses estén salvaguardados.

Que son juezas es indicativo de los grandes pasos grandes hechos por las mujeres en historia reciente en la búsqueda de la excelencia profesional e intelectual.

El modelo de la justicia se representa a menudo como matrona que lleva una espada y escalas y luce con los ojos vendados. Este icono moderno adorna con frecuencia salas de tribunales y palacios de justicia. La diosa femenina Justitia, ella es una combinación de las cualidades de varias: la diosa Fortuna (Suerte) con la griega Helenística (Tyche) y la Némesis (Venganza).

Ella es señora Justicia.

Conozca dos tales figuras en el Bronx que manejen su intelecto y juicio tan hábilmente como cualquier modelo épico.

La Tia Martin

Honorable La Tia Martin toma la práctica de la burla bien en serio

Los juicios simulados, es decir, o cualquier ejercicio de esa clase, que le permite a los jóvenes estudiantes, particularmente mujeres, la oportunidad de participar en experiencias simuladas en las cortes. "Quiero exponerlos a una carrera en leyes, pero más importante, quiero ayudarlos a desarrollar destrezas para que pasen a ser mujeres jóvenes maduras", dijo la Juez Martin.

De hecho, tan serio, que la Juez Martin ha fundado una Academia de Verano Judicial para mujeres jóvenes en la Universidad Pace, donde hay excepcionales mujeres estudiantes de escuela superior, mayormente minorías, con un interés

expreso en una carrera en leyes que pueden participar en un programa intensivo con otros jueces, abogados y profesores de leyes como instructores.

En su año inaugural en el 2009, la Academia de Verano Judicial tuvo 25 estudiantes y 32 estudiantes en el 2010. La Juez Martin espera que la Academia tenga 50 graduados a finales del verano en el 2011.

Se espera que las jóvenes trabajen duro.

El curso incluye un programa de estudio introductorio e intenso en familia, ambiente y leyes de salud, como también contratos, investigación y escritura, entre otros tópicos legales.

Deben de asistir todos los días, participar completamente en la clase y someter un papel legal comprensivo que culmina un largo proyecto de curso de investigación para su revisión. Por su arduo trabajo, se les recompensa con un certificado de finalización, un modesto sueldo y otros premios, los cuales han incluido boletos para los juegos de los Yankees.

"Les decimos que no hay barreras si estudian fuerte y persiguen cualquiera que sea su sueño", explica la Juez Martin. "El cielo es el límite".

La Juez de la Corte Suprema Civil del Bronx lo sabría.

Una niña de los proyectos Gun Hill Road, la Juez Martin pasó a ser una joven asistiendo al escuela parroquial Concepcion Inmaculada y más tarde a la Escuela Superior Mother Butler donde estudio fuerte y soñó en grande.

Obtuvo su bachillerato de la Universidad Boston y su 'JD' de la Universidad Rutgers. Nombrada por el alcalde Rudolph Giuliani al banco de la Corte Suprema en el 1999, la Juez Martin sirvió previamente como Juez en una Corte Civil y Criminal en Nueva York. Antes de su nombramiento, la Juez Martin fue Consejera General de la Oficina del Sheriff de la ciudad de Nueva York, y fue Inspectora General del Departamento de Finanzas de la ciudad de Nueva York.

También trabajo en la Comisión de Impuestos, La Agencia de Servicios de Información Financiera y La Oficina de Nomina como también Asistente de Fiscal de Distrito en la Oficina del Fiscal de Distrito del Condado.

A lo largo de la extensa carrera de la Juez Martin corre una distinta corriente de preocupación por los asuntos de específica relevancia para la mujer. Su trabajo, dentro y fuera del banco, la ha llevado, bastante a menudo, donde la ley y los intereses y derechos de la mujer se unen.

Como Juez de la Corte Civil, la Juez Martin escuchó de casos de violencia domestica envolviendo a muchos delincuentes por primera vez. Ayudados por la promulgación de la Ley de Violencia Contra la Mujer del 1994 (VAWA '94), la cual fue firmada a ley por el Presidente Clinton el 13 de septiembre de

1994, y formo parte del Control de Crímenes Violentos y la Ley de Aplicación de 1994, VAWA '94. Este fue el primer paquete de legislación diseñado para prevenir los actos violentos contra la mujer.

La nueva ley proveyó \$1.6 billones para mejorar la investigación y el enjuiciamiento de crímenes violentos perpetrados contra la mujer, aumentó la detención preventiva del acusado, impuso restitución automática y obligatoria en aquellos convictos, y permitió la reparación civil en casos donde los acusados salieron impunes.

La Organización Nacional de la Mujer describió el proyecto firmado como "el mayor avance en los derechos civiles para la mujer en casi dos décadas".

Para el Juez Martin, significó que la plaga de violencia domestica podría ser abordada con amplios recursos a un nivel local que previamente faltaba.

Como indican las estadísticas, la violencia domestica tiende a estar concentrada en áreas urbanas densamente pobladas tales como el Bronx, y puede existir un ciclo donde un incidente de violencia es seguido por mucho remordimiento y una lluvia de afección y regalos. Se pueden tomar más de 25 incidentes de violencia, señala la Juez Martin, antes de que la victima "despierte" y se de cuenta de que la secuencia de eventos es poco probable que cambie.

"Fue difícil", admite la Juez Martin en su tiempo de escuchar tales casos. "A menudo, habian momentos donde había mucha conmoción y tristeza".

Con muchos casos ante ella de parejas que habian estado envueltas por muchos años, y donde había niños, estos recursos adicionales se necesitaban – y fueron utilizados.

Se permitieron muchas medidas diferentes para los delincuentes por primera vez con profundas raíces en la comunidad y un deseo demostrable de someterse a un tratamiento, incluyendo asesoría y terapia con trabajadores sociales y otras evaluaciones.

El trabajo actual de la Juez Martin en la Corte Suprema Civil se enfoca mayormente en casos matrimoniales, donde los asuntos son resueltos en un numero de maneras que fluctúan entre acuerdos amigables a querellas contenciosas.

Se ríe mientras recuerda las muchas veces en las cuales ha sido llamada para ocuparse en asuntos aparentemente triviales que han sido aumentados a través de los lentes de rigidez y hasta memorias nostálgicas.

La Juez Martin es incansable en su apoyo de un sistema legal y judicial más diverso. Junto a la Academia de Verano Judicial, la Juez Martin también ha servido como presidenta de la Asociación Nacional de Mujeres Jueces (NAWJ, por sus siglas en inglés), y

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durante su tenencia, aplaudió la nominación de la Honorable Sonia Sotomayor, nativa del Bronx, a la máxima corte. Estuvo presente en la ceremonia formal el 9 de septiembre de 2009 en Washington, D.C., para presenciar el histórico evento con el Presidente Obama, Vicepresidente Biden y muchos otros.

“La confirmación de Sotomayor y la investidura de hoy de otra sobresaliente mujer jurista...es un testimonio del perdurable compromiso de merito a nuestra

Oregon (vea la revista GQ), o Persona en Necesidad de Tutela (P.I.N.G. por sus siglas en inglés).

Vea la Juez Wilma Guzmán.

Y cuando lo haga, asegúrese de pronunciar su nombre correctamente. Guzmán. Hay un acento ahí.

Ella dice su apellido correctamente, y tan placenteramente y firme como sostiene y anula objeciones en su sala, donde todos, desde jurados prospectos a abogados, de oficinistas a oficiales de la corte, son avisados de venir a trabajar preparados,

conferencias para cualquier persona que todavía no tenga 18 años de edad), por nombrar algunos.

Pero ella es clara, sin importar la clase de caso, o como va a ser escuchado y decidido, siempre: “Razonable, adecuada y justa”.

Es lo que ella desea de todos los involucrados.

Ya sea que el caso ante la Juez Guzmán trate de una niña de 15 años cuya fractura en la pierna es tan severa y duradera que se lamenta de poder usar zapatos con tacón alto, u otro niño joven cuyo accidente de la infancia lo dejó con dedos cortados por lo cual se burlan continuamente y lo cual el intenta esconder utilizando guantes, la antigua fiscal tiene mucho interés en encontrar una resolución equitativa que hable de una visión a largo plazo de la justicia.

“Para muchos de ellos, esto es un trato de una vez. Esto es todo”, explica ella acerca de las muchas personas, jóvenes y maduras, para las cuales la corte actúa como protector contra intereses abusivos o daños injustificados.

La Juez Guzmán cita que muchos casos pueden ser complicados y señalados, como el Artículo 81, también conocido como el procedimiento a seguir cuando se va a nombrar a alguien como amparador, en el caso que la persona envejeciente halla sufrido de una disminución de su capacidad para tomar decisiones el mismo. Estos casos algunas veces incluyen cuestiones polémicas, dado a la dinámica de la familia envuelta.

Es su deseo que más familias hablaran más abiertamente entre ellos acerca de las opciones para diferentes clases de cuidados a largo plazo o decisiones de terminar la vida según sus padres envejecen, y los niños tienen que estar más concientes y envueltos.

“Deje saber sus deseos”, aconseja ella. “Estas conversaciones son definitivamente difíciles de tener, si, pero deje saber sus deseos. Es difícil para cualquiera enfrentar la mortalidad, pero el desorden por no hacerlo es peor”.

“Y déjelo escrito”, añade ella rápidamente.

Guzmán ha visto lo suficiente para saber.

Es una jurista experimentada, habiendo pasado ocho años como juez de la Corte Civil, donde escuchó casos en la Corte de Pequeños Reclamos que reinformaron sus agudos instintos.

“Usted recibe todo”, dijo ella.

La Juez Guzmán se ríe mientras recuerda casos en los cuales existieron reclamos que parecían desafiar la lógica (la mega tienda que fue acusada de irrumpir en los hogares de las personas para robar sus pantalones durante la noche, solo para reemplazarlos con diferentes tamaños de pantalones, por ejemplo), pero ahí se escuchó de todo, sin falta, y a menudo concluye con una respuesta de la marca.

“Decisión reservada”.

La Juez Guzmán explica que la frase era simple “Escuela de Juez 101”, una premisa básica que significa que usted simplemente oculta comentarios innecesarios. Usted solo necesita saber los meritos del caso, preguntar información adicional si la necesita, y entonces concluye con “Decisión reservada”. Puede hacer su decisión final luego de retirarse a su oficina.

“Usted está tratando con las emociones de las personas. Han tenido batallas, la gente está molesta...Solo desean ser escuchados”, dijo ella.

La Juez Guzmán siempre ha estado conciente que prestar atención y comprometerse al arduo trabajo es lo que



Judge La Tia Martin with fellow New York State judges and US Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor.

Juez La Tia Martin, junta a demás juezas del Estado de Nueva York y la Jueza de la Corte Suprema Sonia Sotomayor.

nación, y la diversa cara de la justicia en nuestro gran país”, declaró la Juez Martin en ese momento.

Indudablemente ella es, una jurista activa que ha trabajado duro en mantener un entorno completamente democrático en su sala. Y también es un modelo reflexivo y dinámico que ha tomado en serio el credo no oficial de “trabaje duro, sueñe en grande” de otra pensadora trabajadora, de la region de Ballynunnery en Irlanda.

La Madre Marie Joseph Butler, la monja irlandesa a quien es dedicada la escuela superior de la Juez Martin y cuya filosofía sirvió como carácter distintivo de la escuela, fue una líder extraordinaria quien se dedicó a la educación y el desarrollo de mujeres jóvenes, brillantes e independientes quienes simplemente podían cambiar el mundo.

Un poco después de entrar al Convento del Sagrado Corazón de María en Francia en el 1876, la joven monja fue enviada a dirigir la escuela en Sag Harbor. Ella tomó el reto de corazón, y logro abrir colegios para mujeres jóvenes en Roma, Paris, Nueva York y California.

La Jueza La Tia Martin sin duda le ha hecho caso en todo.

La Madre Butler estaría orgullosa de sus jóvenes a cargo en Gun Hill.

Wilma Guzmán

PING.

La sola palabra puede evocar, dependiendo con quien hables, el más exitoso ‘golf putter’ en la historia (vea Karsten Solheim), la red social de iTunes (vea Steve Jobs), el cuarto mejor restaurante americano encontrado en Portland,

como ella lo hace. “No leyendo el periódico”, dice ella con una sonrisa.

Para la Juez Guzmán, en la Corte Civil Suprema del Bronx desde el 2005, el trabajo de ética es un trabajo de vida.

Para aquel entonces la madre soltera de dos niñas, quien también trabajaba como secretaria legal a tiempo completo, decidió que asistir a la escuela de leyes de la Universidad St. John’s durante la noche era posible.

¿Pero que otra cosa podría hacer esta nativa del Bronx quien a la edad de 10 años sabia que quería una carrera en leyes?

Fue a esa temprana edad que ella y su hermano descubrieron que su vecino de edad avanzada en Elmsere Place, con el que toda su familia había sido amigo, había muerto inesperadamente, solo en su casa. Pronto supieron que no tenía familiares.

La Jueza Guzmán recuerda cuanto le intrigó el lado forense y legal alrededor de la muerte de su vecino, y como se prestaba un servicio legal y otros, por su muerte, a pesar de la ausencia de familia o amigos.

“El estaba solo, peor no totalmente”, dice pensativamente.

Entonces a lo mejor no es sorprendente el encontrar a la Juez Guzmán pasando mucho tiempo en estos días deliberando pensativamente y diligentemente en muchos asuntos donde los intereses de personas cuya capacidad autónoma de tomar decisiones respecto a su salud o propiedades, o similares, se reduce a la intervención de la corte.

Como juez de la Corte Suprema, la Juez Guzmán escucha todos los juicios: mala practica medica, accidentes automovilísticos, mociones, compromisos infantiles (arreglando



Wilma Guzman

finalmente hará la diferencia.

Después de todo, antes de trabajar un trabajo a tiempo completo como paralegal para apoyar a su familia mientras conseguía su título durante la noche, pasó seis años asistiendo a clases nocturnas en John Jay, finalmente consiguiendo su bachillerato en justicia criminal en el 1978.

Eso fue una década de educación, junto con valor y sacrificio.

Luego de su graduación, la Juez Guzmán trabajó como investigadora en la Unidad de Crímenes de Sexo en la oficina de distrito del condado de Kings y en el sector privado antes de regresar a la escuela para su grado en leyes en St. John’s.

Que la llevo a una carrera como abogada en daños de litigio personal en Manhattan, entrando en una profesión con pocos latinos y aun menos latinas. Pasó a ser miembro del “Foro de Defensores del Millón de Dólares”, una asociación nacional de abogados en casos que logran veredictos de \$1 millón o más.

En el 1999, fue elegida juez para la corte civil, y en el 2005, ganó la elección para su actual término de 14 años en la Corte Suprema del Bronx.

Disciplina y enfoque.

“Como juez, tienes que tener la habilidad de escuchar todos los lados...tienes que escuchar”.

No es sacudida por la emoción o se molesta, y su ecuanimidad es contagiosa.

En general, su pequeño círculo de empleados ha estado con ella desde que está en la Corte Suprema, y son considerados como muy unidos y serios.

Durante una reciente visita, en la cual un doctor dio testimonio acerca de la capacidad mental de una victima de un accidente, la Juez Guzmán escuchó atentamente mientras sus oficinistas y oficiales de la corte hacían lo mismo. Los abogados fueron claros y respondieron rápida y completamente a sus preguntas, sabiendo que no se entretendría mucho más.

Cuando un atrevido compañero asumió que se perdería un día de juicio por un día de fiesta, ella lo corrigió.

Dulcemente y firmemente.

“Yo estaré trabajando. Todos estaremos trabajando. No asuma, abogado”, dijo la Juez Guzmán.

Es Guzmán.

Hay un acento ahí.