THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO LAW SCHOOL
RECORD

CLASS OF '67

William J. Bowe, executive vice-president, general counsel, and secretary of Enron Development Corporation, participated in a roundtable discussion among corporate counsel for the Chicago Bar Association's Continuing Legal Education Series on February 1, 1994.

ROBERTA COOPER RAMO '67 TO HEAD ABA

Roberta Cooper Ramo has recently been voted president-elect of the American Bar Association. When she officially takes office in August 1995, Mrs. Ramo, a general practitioner from Albuquerque, New Mexico, will become the first woman to lead the ABA in its 117-year history.

"I am very proud of being a lawyer and very proud of the American Bar Association. I chose to run because I was anxious to have the opportunity to speak out to people about the importance of the legal system and our profession to the success of American democracy."

Mrs. Ramo already has begun to outline an agenda for her tenure, which she hopes will focus on areas that she feels have been neglected over the years, specifically, the concerns of the general public and its relationship with with the legal profession.

"We are going to be talking about the role of lawyers in society. Explaining to people why in American society, both for our freedom and for commercial reasons, that having your own lawyer and a government of laws is what really made us successful.

"The ABA is very important. It is the largest volunteer profession organization in the world. And the role of the ABA in society is to speak up for the justice system and they have done just that. That part has always made me proud of the Association."

In looking back at her election, she stressed the great support she received from both men and women. "I think you can really measure that support by the fact that I am from New Mexico, which has only three people in the House of Delegates, compared to other states that have fifty or sixty. Obviously we received a lot of support from people all around the country.

In addition, Mrs. Ramo emphasized her gratitude to the University of Chicago Law School. "The quality of education I received there was remarkable in every way. I have a lot of loyalty to the Law School."

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February 21, 1994

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General Counsel
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Dear Bill:

I have been buried in paper (at my size not all that hard to have happened) and as a treat I guess for being semi-diligent just saw your wonderful letter. First congratulations to you! Somehow I missed when you became both Executive Vice-President and actual General Counsel. Lucky for Britannica and I hope great fun for you. Does this mean that at last I know someone who can get me volume 4? One of the my best times in Chicago was visiting you several years ago and being treated to lunch at the Art Institute.

I will be in Chicago a lot the next few years, and it would be wonderful if you have time to let me treat you back! How did you know that I would be in Washington in April? Will you be there for the Board meeting?

Let me know if that is the case so I can make sure I see you. One of both the nicest and funniest things that happened in Kansas City is that Bernadine and I were both at a the women's caucus lunch together. I would have bet my entire lifetime supply of legal pads when we left Chicago that neither of us would be found within the moving hallowed halls of the ABA!

Please call if you have time. Even if you don't as I make my way through Chicago these next months I will call you!

Roberta Cooper Ramo

Conversations / *Roberta Cooper Ramo*

The A.B.A.'s Party of the First Part Can Play as Many Parts as Anyone

By DAVID MARGOLICK

ROBERTA COOPER RAMO, feeling tentative and utterly out-of-place and barely a fraction of her 24 years, visited her first courtroom in 1966, after completing her second year at the University of Chicago Law School. Her mission was to spring a group of civil rights protesters, associates of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., from jail. Before she could free her first clients, however, she first had to free herself — from the bailiff. "Sit down lady, sit down!" he declared, grabbing her dress for emphasis, as her case was called. "This is for the lawyers!"

Mrs. Ramo appealed to the bench — to a judge who, she recalled last week, looked "both 800 years old and 800 feet high." He peered down at her over his glasses, listened to her explanation, then turned to the bailiff. "Well," he finally said, "she looks like a lawyer to me."

For women in the law at the time, such signs of acceptance were few and far between. Mrs. Ramo was one of only six women in her law school class, and the only one who was married. But women now constitute nearly 25 percent of the legal profession and 44 percent of the current law school population. And while still scarce in certain strata, notably Wall Street-style partnerships, they have scaled a variety of heights.

The latest to do so is Mrs. Ramo, now a 51-year-old general practitioner from Albuquerque, N.M., who is set to become the first woman ever to lead the American Bar Association.

For women in the bar, the 1990's have become an era of seconds rather than firsts. There are now two women on the United States Supreme Court, and soon women will occupy the two top slots at the Justice Department. And on Tuesday the A.B.A., holding its mid-year convention in Kansas City, Mo., will not only choose Ms. Ramo to be its president but Martha Barnett of Tallahassee, Fla., to be chairman of the House of Delegates, its second-most-prestigious post. Both women won't take office until August 1995 — enough time for the increasingly diverse and liberal 375,000-member group to ponder the startling changes in its midst.

Like most female lawyers of her generation, Mrs. Ramo can tell her fair share of horror stories. Just as the young Ruth Bader Ginsburg failed to receive an offer from the ostensibly liberal New York firm of Paul, Weiss, Rifkind, Wharton & Garrison despite a successful summer there, Mrs. Ramo was unable to find work fresh out of law school; she struck out at numerous firms near Duke University, where her husband had received a cardiology fellowship.

"Basically, I sent letters to everybody and nobody returned my letters, and then I called and nobody returned my calls," she said. She got a job — at the Ford Foundation — only when her law school dean, Phil Neal, asked Terry Sanford, the former Governor of North Carolina, to intervene.

From there she moved to Shaw University, a black school in Raleigh where she taught for two years. A law firm in San Antonio hired her in 1970, when she was nine months pregnant with her second child. Two years later she moved to Albuquerque, her childhood home, where she worked for various firms of various sizes, including one firm consisting solely of herself. She specialized in health law, real estate, probate work and juggling.

When Mrs. Ramo talks about how much good lawyers can do, it seems more like the voice of conviction and experience than the Law Day platitudes of some of her 116 male predecessors. She can recall hearing Martin Luther King speaking one night in a tenement on Chicago's South Side, telling the city's poor that the law of the land would take care of their problems if they learned how to use it.

Orlin Wagner/Associated Press

Cooper Ramo at the A.B.A. convention in Kansas City, Mo.

From North Carolina to New Mexico, the lawyer took what was offered and made do with it. It wasn't much, at first. (But only at first.)

She remembers, too, seeing her black students become emboldened in their civil rights struggles by the rulings being handed down by the Warren Court. "In that situation, I saw how really miraculous lawyers could be in really difficult times," she said. "Kids who didn't much believe in anything believed in the United States Supreme Court and in the power of lawyers to solve problems, and I do, too."

But Mrs. Ramo — she prefers Mrs. to Ms., which she claims is too difficult to pronounce — has never been a firebrand, nor a particular favorite of the A.B.A.'s feminists. Her niche in the bar group lay in law office management, not civil rights. For all the symbolism of her election, her rhetoric is not especially lofty. True, a woman and mother might have more credibility with a public wary of lawyers than "some tall guy in an eight-piece suit." But she does not seem especially interested in tending to the bar's tattered image. "I think we need to not worry so much about what people say about the image of lawyers and spend our time worrying about being really good productive members of our profession and first-rate members of the society," she said. "If we do all those things, I think the image problem will take care of itself."

Hers is not the oratory of inspiration but the language of pragmatism, learned while she reared a family, ran the Albuquerque Bar Association, kept her own business going and led both the New Mexico Symphony Orchestra's board of directors and the University of New Mexico's Board of Regents.

She speaks of tending better to the nation's sole practitioners and small firm lawyers, historically neglected by the A.B.A. and increasingly vulnerable as legal technology grows more sophisticated and expensive. She speaks of assuring that lawyers serve clients competently as the law becomes more complex. And she speaks of teaching law students and lawyers to develop the kind of bedside manners she sees in her cardiologist husband.

As much as anything, she speaks about helping lawyers make "family values" more than campaign rhetoric. While her sensitivity on this subject stems from her own experiences, she said, she sees it as a "human being issue" rather than a women's issue. "How we deal with the situation in which it's possible to lead a full and first-rate professional life and still be a good parent is something we're all going to have to come to terms with," she said.

Law firms, she said, are re-evaluating time-honored traditions, like working people to death, discarding those who don't quite measure up even after investing mightily in their training, and refusing to accommodate persons with distinctive needs — like conscientious parents.

"Obviously it's not the '80's anymore, and I think all law firms, no matter what their size, are a whole lot more sophisticated about what makes individual practices successful," she said. "It's not as simple as sticking people in offices and having them work as many billable hours as possible."

"Firms are beginning to understand that to be really successful, they have to use lawyers over the course of their entire career," she said. "When you take the long view, then what you see is the child-rearing years are actually a very small part of that time."

For women, she said, the trick is to work out something reasonable with their employers until the children go off to high school and college. "Then women have all the advantages of the maturity and the legal knowledge and training and skill," she said. "And they are ready to go gangbusters in their profession."

Ideas & Trends: Page **18**

At the Bar | David Margolick

More than a century after its founding, a new honorific at the A.B.A.: Madam President.

Two women now sit on the United States Supreme Court, and soon two others will occupy the top two slots at the Justice Department. And next week another, perhaps even more formidable barrier will fall: For the first time, the American Bar Association will elect a woman as president.

On Tuesday, the bar association's nominating committee will choose its president for the 1995-96 term. And having beaten back a number of rivals, men and women alike, and survived some embarrassments in her own backyard, the winner by acclamation will be Roberta Cooper Ramo, a 51-year-old general practitioner from Albuquerque, N.M. She will succeed George Bushnell of Detroit, who, in the A.B.A.'s peculiar, delayed-reaction brand of politics, won't take office himself for another six months.

Mrs. Ramo's ability to juggle family, practice (primarily in real estate and health law), bar association work and extracurricular activities appears to defy Isaac Newton. But like many female pioneers, she had to defy the laws of the marketplace before she could tackle the laws of physics. Upon graduating from the University of Chicago Law School in 1967, she could not get a job — or, in many instances, even an interview — in the Raleigh-Durham-Chapel Hill area of North Carolina, where she had moved with her husband, Barry Ramo, then a cardiologist in training.

Reached yesterday in Kansas City, Mo., where the bar group has gathered for its winter meeting, Mrs. Ramo said she was "sort of amazed and delighted" by her impending election. "I think it is a big deal for women and for men," she said. "When the world sees women in positions in which they're exercising a lot of authority and speaking about important national issues, it helps both men and women realize the enormous potential women bring to the national table."

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For its first 40 years, the A.B.A., founded in 1878, had no women at all in its ranks. Records show that a Mrs. J. B. Ott of Iowa applied for membership in 1902, but 16 years passed before a woman — whether it was Mrs. Ott is not clear — broke through. A report released four years ago by the A.B.A.'s commission on women in the profession — Hillary Rodham Clinton, chairwoman — concluded that until the early 1980's the role of women in the A.B.A.'s policymaking House of Delegates was "for all practical purposes nonexistent."

But soon it became conceivable, and then inevitable, that a woman would someday lead the 375,000-member group; the only questions were who and when. Other names were mentioned, but Mrs. Ramo outmaneuvered them all, in part by bypassing many of the customary stops — a state bar presidency, for instance — on a national candidate's Via Dolorosa.

She first sought the national bar presidency in 1991, and, in the A.B.A.'s version of the 1924 Democratic convention, lost on the 88th ballot. This year she faced three opponents: Joanne Garvey of San Francisco, Blake Tartt of Houston and Jerome Shestack of Philadelphia. All fell by the wayside, Mr. Shestack only 10 days ago. A famously liberal lawyer who launched a women's rights committee within the bar association 24 years ago, he learned the perils of opposing an idea whose time has come — indeed, one he helped bring about.

So inexorable was her march to election that Mrs. Ramo, who once led the A.B.A.'s law practice management section, was not derailed by the bankruptcy last year of her law firm, Poole, Kelly & Ramo. The firm, where she was managing partner for 12 years, ended up nearly $500,000 in debt. Although the A.B.A. has its own financial problems, few would have considered personal familiarity with Chapter 11 much of a credential. But neither, it turned out, was it much of a liability for Mrs. Ramo, who has since joined Modrall, Sperling, Roehl, Harris & Sisk in Albuquerque, New Mexico's largest law firm.

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Mrs. Ramo was born in Denver and arrived in Albuquerque at the age of 4. After law school, she taught for two years at Shaw University, a black school in Raleigh. A San Antonio firm hired her in 1970, when she was nine months pregnant with the first of her two children.

In 1972 she and her husband moved back to Albuquerque, where for one three-year stretch she practiced on her own. It is a credential nearly as unusual among A.B.A. presidents as her sex and her religion; Mrs. Ramo will be the bar association's first Jewish president since 1979.

Until her youngest child graduated from high school, she practiced law part time. "Compared to working and raising small children, nothing will ever be hard again," she once said.

While most bar spouses have historically done little at bar conventions but socialize, Dr. Barry Ramo has resuscitated several people there, his wife said. He can also be seen five nights a week in Albuquerque, discussing health-related issues on the 10 o'clock news. "In New Mexico," Mrs. Ramo said proudly, "*he* is really the star."

At full steam

Roberta Cooper Ramo on the track to be first female leader of ABA

By Stephanie B. Goldberg
SPECIAL TO THE TRIBUNE

While Roberta Cooper Ramo, who in 1995 will become the first woman president of the American Bar Association, figures to become a role model for thousands of women, her own role model has been "The Little Engine That Could."

Petite, poised and energetic, Ramo seems to brush off obstacles that might stop lesser mortals in their tracks. In 1991, the Albuquerque lawyer failed to win her first bid to head the 375,000-member, Chicago-based organization.

Returning home, Ramo was astonished to discover her law office flooded with messages from women across the country, including many outside the legal profession, expressing disappointment.

"I did not appreciate how much support there was for me," said Ramo, 51, who was slated in February to run unopposed and was named president-elect at the ABA's annual meeting in New Orleans in early August. Even though her presidency is a year away, Ramo is already garnering national attention because, as she puts it, "there's a new sheriff in town."

She has her agenda mapped out, and high on the list is elevating the sagging public image of lawyers who, Ramo believes, aren't fully appreciated for the role they play in maintaining the democratic process. She also wants to hone in on the issue of violence.

"The problems of violence concern both me and the ABA greatly," she said. "You can't have a legal system in which everyone is in terror of being gunned down each day."

Targeting domestic abuse is critical because, "besides being the No. 1 health problem among women, it's also the place where the seeds of violence are sown in children," she said.

One of Ramo's pet projects will be orchestrating a joint effort with the American Medical Association to address these issues.

Ramo doesn't minimize the significance of her election, which is a rarity among professional organizations. The AMA, for instance, has never had a female president.

"It would be ridiculous to contend that after 117 years (of male presidents at the ABA), it's not a big deal," she concedes.

That's because Ramo will be presiding over the nation's largest legal organization, whose key functions include lobbying for lawyers in Congress, evaluating the qualifications of U.S. Supreme Court nominees and other federal judicial candidates, accrediting law schools and speaking out on matters of public concern.

In 1992, for example, the association passed a resolution stating its support for reproductive choice at a time when the Supreme Court was poised to overrule Roe vs. Wade.

"Personally, it's important to me to make people understand that I'm the president of all the lawyers," she said.

But Ramo is also quick to declare herself a feminist.

"You couldn't have lived my life and not be," she said.

Her earliest ambition was to be a university president, which led her to law school because it seemed a natural stepping stone. Once there, however, she fell in love with the law and its possibilities for social change.

HIGH PROFILE

Photo by Kim Jew/ABA

"There's a new sheriff in town," says Roberta Cooper Ramo, president-elect of the American Bar Association.

She grew up in Albuquerque in a family where "no one ever said to me that you can't do this because you're a girl," she recalled. Consequently, "I didn't have to cast off the shackles that a lot of women have had put upon them by society."

From her father, the owner of a chain of western-wear stores, Ramo inherited an interest in business management that eventually led her to become managing partner of her law firm and a national speaker on law practice.

But even though Ramo said she has never been a victim of the glass ceiling or sexual harassment, she acknowledges that "it wouldn't be possible to live through my times and not be sensitive to the difficulties that all of us had fought through."

Those difficulties included being unable to find a job when she graduated from law school in 1967 from the University of Chicago after receiving her bachelor's degree from the University of Colorado. Ramo was bound for Durham, N.C., where her husband of three years, Barry, was to begin a residency as a cardiologist at Duke University.

"I sent out letters, but nobody responded," she said. The one firm that did interview her had misread her application and thought she was Robert Ramo.

Finally, the dean of the law school intervened and contacted Terry Sanford, who had just completed a term as governor of North Carolina. Sanford helped Ramo find a job working for the Ford Foundation. When the program ended a year later, Ramo was hired by Shaw University in Raleigh, N.C., a small, black college, to help students prepare for law school and to teach courses in African-American studies and Constitutional law.

Ironically, being pregnant with her first child, Josh—now 25 and a publishing executive with Newsweek's online division—may have won and lost her jobs. She was forced to turn down a teaching fellowship because it

required her to go out of town the week of her due date. Then she moved to San Antonio so her husband could serve in the military.

A local law firm hired her on the spot when she was nine months pregnant.

Ramo was assigned to the civil litigation department and taken under the wing of one of the firm's elders, a Republican ex-Marine "who was determined he was going to make a lawyer out of me if we both died trying," she said. Ramo recalls the firm as being enormously supportive, even allowing her to juggle her schedule so she could write a book on office management for the ABA.

The next stop was Albuquerque, where Ramo and her husband put down roots. By now a mother of two—Ramo's daughter, Jennifer, 23, is coordinator of an inner-city volunteer program in Los Angeles—she practiced on her own for three years and later joined a firm where she innovated a flex-time arrangement.

She specialized in commercial real estate and health care law and became managing partner for 12 years at Poole, Kelly & Ramo. The firm filed for bankruptcy in 1993. The insolvency did not seem to affect either Ramo's candidacy or her career, and she moved last year to the firm of Modrall, Sperling, Roehl, Harris & Sisk.

She also broke with the tradition that ABA presidential candidates had to be both former state bar association presidents and chairs of the ABA's House of Delegates, which votes on association policy. Ramo was neither, although she was president of the Albuquerque Bar Association. Some saw her as leapfrogging, but Ramo claims that it's actually a myth that candidates must have these prerequisites.

"The backgrounds of the men are as varied as mine," she said. "What's important is to have enough participation so that you have an idea of the breadth of the association's interests and get to be known by the nominating committee."

Accumulating the necessary credentials can take years, which is why Ramo believes there have been a dearth of women candidates until recently.

"Fifteen years ago I hadn't done any of the things that would have led me to believe I could be ABA president," said Ramo, who has held various ABA positions and has headed the local symphony board.

She credits the association's Commission on Women in the Profession, first chaired by Hillary Rodham Clinton in 1986, with prodding the ABA to improve its record on promoting women into the leadership ranks. The commission kept the issue on the front burner by issuing annual report cards to groups within the ABA, grading them on their efforts to advance women.

The current chair, Chicago lawyer Laurel Bellows, believes that Ramo's election spells a sea change.

"The influx of women into the profession has changed the 'face of the profession' so that now the ABA nominating committee can picture Roberta at the ABA's helm and not a 6-foot-tall man with silver hair and tortoise-shell glasses," Bellows said.

Ramo has a distinctively different leadership style, said Bellows, who made Chicago Magazine's recent list of the city's 10 most powerful lawyers. "Roberta's style is one of competence but not aggressiveness," she said.

According to her husband, Ramo is also a consensus builder.

"Her great strength is bringing together people of disparate views and helping them find a common ground so that they can accomplish a project that makes everyone proud," he said. He praises her as "extremely well read," "a quick study" and "a tireless worker," and agrees with her assessment that she is a "fabulous" cook—possibly the first ABA president to make that claim publicly.

Ramo said she doubts that lawyer bashers will go easy on her because she's a woman.

"I'm happy to stand up to Dan Quayle," who blasted lawyers in the '92 campaign, or "anyone else who doesn't understand that lawyers are the keystone of democracy," she said.