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DEFENDER

BACDL Newsletter for the Professional Criminal Defense Lawyer
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This Issue is dedicated to:

Women as Leaders in the Practice of Criminal Defense Law

<p>Meet Regina Tsombanakis, Esq. Criminal Defense Lawyer</p>  <p>Office: 954-728-8885 regts@yahoo.com</p> <p>Regina Tsombanakis was born in Montreal, Canada to parents who had emigrated from Greece. Her mother, Christina, spoke only Greek but her father, Emmanuel, learned to speak English through his own self-study. Regina learned to speak both languages fluently. There was tremendous unrest and turmoil in Montreal during Regina’s school years over which language would</p>	<p>Meet Roshawn Banks, Esq. Criminal Defense Lawyer</p>  <p>Office: 954-747-1843 rbanks@thealllawcenter.com</p> <p>Roshawn Banks is a native of the Dairy State, born in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. She knew that she wanted to be a lawyer from 5th grade. She told everyone she was going to be a corporate lawyer for the Master Lock Company in her home town. As her life went on, Roshawn definitely achieved becoming a lawyer but her sights changed to Criminal Defense.</p>	<p>Meet Teresa Williams, Esq. Criminal Defense Lawyer</p>  <p>Office: 954-761-9131 twilliamslaw99@gmail.com</p> <p>Teresa Williams was born in Bayside, Queens, NY. She lived there until age 14 when her mother (Judy) married a nuclear design engineer based in Ft. Pierce, FL. The family moved to Jensen Beach right on the Ocean. Teresa wasn’t very happy at first to have to leave all of her friends and the lifestyle she was accustomed to. Within a short period of time, however,</p>
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Regina [continued]:

prevail as the official sanctioned language: French or English. Regina had to become fluent in French as that became the government “forced” language in school during her formative years. There was no racial or religious conflict in Montreal.

Regina never thought about becoming a lawyer when she was younger. She had her heart set on pursuing the performing arts as an actress. When her dad announced they were moving to Hollywood, Regina was ready. However, it was Hollywood, Florida. Regina entered South Broward High School at age 14. As a cultured young lady who was fluent in three languages, Regina learned practical lessons about prejudice that would later help form the foundation of her legal career. Having left a large Greek area of Montreal to come to Hollywood where there were very few Greek people and being confronted with racial prejudice for the first time, Regina resolved that this would strengthen her character to get through the crisis on a daily basis.

Regina began her education at Broward Community College where she earned an A.A. in Business. She went on to the University of Miami where she earned a B.A. in Business Administration in 1993. Regina then entered on to Law School at St. Thomas University in Miami. She graduated in 1996 with a J.D. and passed the Bar. Regina Tsombanakis, Esq. thought she would capitalize on her business background by working with a civil firm and beginning to make money. Having clerked with such a firm, she found the work unchallenging. As usual, the partner does all the lawyering and the law clerk does little of substance.

In order to utilize her theatrical

Roshawn [continued]:

Roshawn began her education at the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee Campus. One winter day, the snow was so deep and the air so cold, that she came home and told her family, “I am going to find a school where there is no winter.” She meant it. {Her entire family remains in Milwaukee to this day.} Roshawn headed south to check out Florida State University and earned her Bachelor of Science, Social Work in 1995.

After converting from Seminole to Gator, Roshawn earned her Juris Doctor from the University of Florida in 1998 and immediately passed the Bar. Roshawn Banks, Esq.’s first job in law was with the Brevard County Public Defender’s Office where she learned to try cases, Roshawn won her first 12 jury trials. She also taught in the Paralegal program at the Brevard Community College during that time. Roshawn taught Criminal Law, Family Law and Law Office Management.

In 2002, Roshawn headed further south. She came to Ft. Lauderdale to work for the Broward County Attorney’s Office doing civil work. After about one year, she missed Criminal Defense and trial work so she went to the Broward Public Defender’s. She worked there until 2005 when she left to take on the challenge and open her own criminal defense practice. Roshawn joined Nova’s Law School as an Adjunct Professor in 2003 teaching in the Advanced Legal Skills and Values Program. She has taught Pretrial Civil Litigation and currently teaches Interviewing & Counseling.

In her practice, Roshawn does mostly criminal defense trial work although she has recently added Bankruptcy and Foreclosure Defense to the firm. Along with this new area, Roshawn is beginning a speaking tour at local

Teresa [continued]:

Teresa met the young man that she eventually married. His name is Kevin Williams.

Teresa graduated from John Carroll High School and went on to the University of Florida and earned her A.A. She and Kevin were married in 1989. Kevin accepted a job offer with IBM in North Carolina and Teresa transferred to the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. She graduated in 1991 with a B.S. in Criminal Justice. Then the couple decided to move back to Florida and Teresa entered Law School at the University of Miami. She graduated in 1994 and passed the Bar.

Teresa’s first job in law was as a prosecutor at the Miami-Dade County State Attorney’s Office. She began there shortly after Janet Reno had left and Katherine Fernandez-Rundle took over. Teresa worked there for 9 years as the Division Chief in the Career Criminal Unit. Since she and Kevin had always lived in Broward, Teresa made the switch to the Statewide Prosecutor’s Office for a period of about one year in 2004. She then went to the law firm of Haliczzer Pettis & Schwamm in Ft. Lauderdale doing civil litigation. She was in charge of a 32-plaintiff lawsuit regarding “mold” and “indoor air quality.”

In 2006, Teresa went out on her own in the practice of Criminal Defense. She became a Board Certified Criminal Defense Trial Lawyer. She has been in the same office for five years and loves trying criminal law cases. She does mostly criminal but does have a controlled caseload of civil rights (police brutality) cases. Starting during her days of “mold” litigation, Teresa has been (and still is) a

<p>Regina [continued]:</p> <p>interest Regina longed to get going in trial work. She landed a job in Orlando with the Orange County Public Defender's Office and tried cases there for 4 years. Then she transferred to the Broward P.D. in order to be closer to her family once again. She worked there for two years before venturing out into private practice. Regina joined up with Allison Gillman's firm. There Regina did mostly Criminal Defense and some Family Law. After a year, Regina opened her own private practice and has been trying cases here ever since. Regina has found happiness and fulfillment in serving the people of South Florida as one of "Liberty's Last Champions."</p> <p>Regina married the love of her life, Max Walzer, originally from Connecticut. Together they have one son named Manny who is 6 years old and loves sports and Star Wars. BACDL is proud that Regina Tsombanakis, Esq. is a member and a dedicated Criminal Defense trial lawyer.</p>	<p>Roshawn [continued]:</p> <p>Churches and several Condo Association meetings.</p> <p>Roshawn has always been active in community activities such as Legal Aid Services of Broward County, ACLU and the NAACP. Roshawn ran for County Court Judge in the last election. Although she did not win, Roshawn received over 30,000 votes. She began her campaign in January of 2009. From then until August 2010, Roshawn worked exhausting days. Not only was she campaigning but she had to maintain her law practice as well. Roshawn says, "The last 6 months of the campaign are very intense and the last 90 days require great endurance. 100% of your time and energy must be focused on the campaign." When the campaign ended all she could do was rest. Finally, she was able to begin exercising, sleeping and eating right again.</p> <p>Roshawn Banks was recently awarded the "Pro Bono Service Award" by the T.J. Reddick Bar Association. She remains active in the ACLU. She is the past Chair of Legal Aid Services of Broward County and is a former board member of the Florida Bar Criminal Procedure Rules Committee, a position she held for five years. Roshawn participates in Legal Redress Clinics through the NAACP and volunteers to work for Rights Restoration.</p> <p>Roshawn has raised one son, Dion who is 21 years old. He lives at home and works locally. BACDL is proud that Roshawn Banks, Esq. is a member and dedicated Criminal Defense trial lawyer.</p>	<p>Teresa [continued]:</p> <p>Lecturer around the State on this subject.</p> <p>Teresa first joined BACDL in 2006. Although she went to a few Board meetings, Teresa didn't really become active then. It wasn't until the then President of FACDL, Richard Hersch, got her involved that she has been active in the Defense organization. She became the Treasurer in 2010 and is slated to become the second only woman President of BACDL in 2014.</p> <p>Teresa's balances her legal career with her family and duties as a mom. She and Kevin have a daughter, Reilly, 14 years old who loves drama; and they have a son, Ryan 12 years old who loves baseball, basketball, football and hockey. BACDL is proud that Teresa Williams, Esq. is a member, Board member, officer and a dedicated Criminal Defense trial lawyer.</p>
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Editor's Column

by Ira Still, Esq.

Women as Leaders in the Practice of Criminal Defense Law

[The following is based on interviews with Regina Tsombanakis, Roshawn Banks and Teresa Williams that recently took place.]

Q #1: What are some of the qualities of "leadership" that you have found apply to women in the practice of law?

Regina: The most important quality is *PERSEVERANCE!* It is easy to be dissuaded from the practice of law. It is more difficult for a woman lawyer to achieve success and potential clients may initially want a man to be their lawyer. As a woman, you must persevere and never give up under the day-to-day stressors. It can be very hard at times being a woman dealing with certain judges and male attorneys. Women lawyers also must develop a sense of *FEARLESSNESS*. Learn to accept the challenges and rise to meet them. Since women generally tend to have a strong background in "dispute resolution," they come to trial law with a real advantage. Women make their points in different ways in life. We should use those qualities in the profession of Law also.

Roshawn: It is very different. As women we have to strive to maintain a higher degree of professionalism, strength and determination. No one really expects you to be a leader and they will not just accept your leadership role, it has to be earned. Women lawyers have to maintain professionalism at all times and in all places. We must give blunt, honest and true advice. We have to be very direct with people so that they don't hang on false hopes and can make good informed decisions about their cases. To be a good leader, we must always be honest with our clients and the community. People expect women to be soft and nice. Those qualities can be there, but we must develop the qualities of firmness; direct and tact in what our honest advice is. We can still be sympathetic but above that we must tell the truth. Always give clients the honest information so that they can decide their best options. Real leaders maintain integrity!

Teresa: Women seem to be far more organized than men and are usually able to think through the process for solving problems all the way to the end. Women tend to take the lead because by our nature we come up with a plan and can see what steps come next. Appearance is very important for women lawyers. Men always seem to stand up and just command respect and importance but women have to earn it by paying attention to all of the details. Once when I was a young prosecutor in Miami I had just finished a jury trial. An older woman juror came up to me in the hallway and said, "Honey, you are a very smart lawyer, but you need to do your nails." I never forgot that blunt advice. From that moment on I have never gone to trial without getting my nails done.

Q #2: What are some of the most difficult things that you have found as a woman representing criminal defendants?

Roshawn: Criminal Defendants expect women lawyers to be way more sympathetic than we really need to be to professionally do our work. Criminal Defendants expect us to be less aggressive. Women lawyers have to be ready to assert the ground rules for the attorney-client relationship right away. Especially because you are a woman you must establish professionalism at the outset so that they know where you are coming from. As a woman, you can never back down to your clients or let them "bully" you. Male defendants will very often try to "hit" on you; women have to be ready with a tactful and professional response, declining such advances.

Teresa: As a woman, it is very difficult to get private paying clients. There are still prejudices out there about hiring an attorney. As soon as I brought on my male partner, I saw an immediate difference in getting clients into the firm. Once they come in to this office, I have no real trouble in closing the deal. As soon as they talk to me, they know I am competent but they also sense my compassion and nurturing over my clients. I have found that when my clients believe they are being treated unfairly by the system that I get very upset. I am ready to stand up a fight to the max for them. I

can say that I have never once had a client who wasn't entirely respectful to me. Men have never tried to step over that line of respect. Only one time when I was interviewing a client in WPB jail, all of the inmates were right there. They started chanting loudly and it really scared me. Even then my client was respectful and protective of me.

Regina: With court appointments, criminal defendants can be very intimidating. When they realize that they have been appointed a woman lawyer, they tend to be annoyed and treat a woman more harshly. You have to be determined to take control over that from the start. In the balance, you will find that many women judges will go out of their way to help and nurture young women attorneys.

Q #3: How do other women outside the field of law relate to you once they hear you are a Criminal Defense Lawyer?

Teresa: Many times women tell me that they find me very intimidating when they first find out that I am a lawyer. Once I realized this, I began not mentioning it until we were able to connect on the level of woman to woman. Then when I have established that initial trust relationship and I do tell them they say something like, "You are too nice to be a lawyer." Most women just cannot see themselves as doing this kind of work or even having a professional career. They will ask, "How can you represent criminals?" It gives me an opportunity to discuss with them how our system works and how we represent issues that are crucial to everyone's freedom. Usually I step forward to take leadership roles in outside groups. They might ask, "How can you run a law practice and also have a family?" They show surprise for something that I have learned to balance.

Regina: I usually get one of two reactions. Some have a hard time with it and say things like, "How can you do that? You have kids!" Others are eager to discuss the field. They look for advice in a good way. They appreciate your judgment, strength and fortitude as a woman professional. It is very important as a woman lawyer to give back to young women who need a helping hand or encouragement. Help them to realize that they must believe in themselves and follow their own dreams.

Roshawn: Women, and to a certain degree, many people are surprised when they find out that I am a lawyer. I have been in practice now for 13 years but since I don't look the "lawyer stereotype" and look young, many women react with disbelief. I think that maintaining credibility is just one hurdle to overcome, especially since I am **young, female** and **African American**. Because you are different, other women (non-lawyers) can come to expect so much from you. Some women initially dislike you because dealing with lawyers can be distasteful and unpleasant. Then there is always the surprise reaction, "criminal defense lawyer, you put drug dealers on the street!" For some reason, when it is a woman it is even worse. I have to be ready with the explanation that we are professionals guiding the accused through a very intimidating criminal procedure. However, when most women get to know me they are encouraged by hearing about what I am doing.

Q #4: What are some of the things you have witnessed during your career that have advanced women in the field of law or were dramatic changes in the field?

Regina: I think immediately of Janet Reno. Here is a woman from South Florida that rose up in a predominantly man's world to become the State Attorney in Miami-Dade. She opened the doors to more women getting jobs as prosecutors. When she went on to be selected by President Clinton as the Attorney General, that was a most encouraging event in my life. Increasingly, more women are becoming judges and elected officials, which shows that women are making great advances in the professions. Attorney Leslie Abramson who represented the Menendez brothers was an inspiring event. Here was a woman with a very powerful personality becoming highly successful before my very eyes. Today, there are increasingly more women on law school faculties and that is a big help for young women thinking of becoming lawyers.

Roshawn: One area that is advancing women and needs to be further opened for women is law professorships at our law schools. There have been advances over the years but so much more needs to be done. Law school is where new lawyers are shaped and women law professors can certainly contribute and shape the future of all lawyers. Since the number of women law students has increased, they deserve to have more women law professors, especially as role

models. Additionally, many people do not expect women lawyers to be aggressive. When a woman is aggressive, it is often viewed as though that woman has “a personal problem of some kind.” A successful woman lawyer can be tough in the courtroom and as cool and calm as any regular person outside of court. It is a good thing. Seeing women succeeding as jurists has helped to change the face of law. Justice Peggy Quince and Justice Barbara Pariente on the Florida Supreme Court, and the women on the U.S. Supreme Court all help to advance women in law.

Teresa: I went to work for a woman State’s Attorney [Katherine Fernandez-Rundle] shortly after she took over for another woman State’s Attorney [Janet Reno]. During that time the upper echelon of the office had great opportunities for women. Over half of the major crimes divisions were headed by women and half of Katherine’s direct advisors were women. We have seen great advances lately for women. Look at the recent elections and how many women ran for judgeships and other offices. I am greatly motivated by the women Justices [Sonia Sotomayor, Elena Kagan and Ruth Bader Ginsburg] who are currently sitting on the U.S. Supreme Court. On the Florida Supreme Court in the last few decades we have seen the first woman Justice in history, Rosemary Barkett. Now there are Justice Barbara Pariente and Justice Peggy Quince. Opportunities for women are abounding but it still is up to you as to what you will make of yourself as a woman. You can do it!

Q #5: What advice would you give to young women who are starting out in their law career (generally)? How about to those heading into Criminal Defense?

Roshawn:

- (1) Maintaining the highest level of professionalism at all times gives a young woman credibility.
- (2) Don’t be afraid to be aggressive on behalf of your clients even from day one of your practice.
- (3) Don’t ever let your clients, the opposing attorney or the judge bully you at any time. Especially when it comes to clients, do not let them rule you!

Teresa: Whatever area of law you choose, work to support the greater good of society. I think Criminal Defense law is the most interesting and exciting field. It is both challenging and rewarding. You must be ready to stand alone for your client against overwhelming power and odds armed only with the Constitution. I continually feel privileged to be a part of the Criminal Justice System. Believe in our laws and stand strong for those who lack the power to do so for themselves.

Regina: Find an area of Law that you love. Commit to that area and go for it. Dress and act like a woman. Learn about appropriate fashion. You don’t have to dress like what you think men should. You don’t need to be rough in your actions and speech. You don’t need to be an “in-your-face” person and you won’t come across offensively if you are a woman who is also firm in your position.



We are thankful for **all** of our Women Criminal Defense Lawyers who have added so much to the substantive law, professionalism and ethics of the Criminal Justice System; to the representation of the poor, the downtrodden, the weak and the wrongfully accused who are our client base; and to our Organization. We are, however, mindful that for each of these great women there are millions of other women around the world who have been held back by a lack of education and opportunity, and who have been oppressed by social systems that lack the insight to open the doors to their success. Hopefully we, within our own lifetimes, will see this change. But it will have to begin with you.

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Letters to the Editor

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