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Q *Where did your M&A journey begin and how did you end up where you are today?*

A My journey began decades back in the 1970s. In those days, M&A was the exclusive preserve of white males. I was lucky to have been assigned, in my second year of articles at Edward Nathan Friedland, to my first mentor Roy Randall, a very successful M&A practitioner, to work with him on his matters. This was unheard of for a woman then and so the firm deserves an accolade for making this possible for me at a time when no or very few other firms were doing that. This propelled me straight from endless debt collecting to M&A and JSE work, carefully guided and mentored by Roy. From knowing almost nothing whatsoever about M&A and the JSE, and understanding little about company law (despite having studied company law at university not so long before), I started to understand and enjoy it, finding it novel and stimulating. This despite being in awe of Roy and his acumen. He thought like a businessman and I tried to emulate him in that regard.

My luck didn't end there for the very next year, as a first year associate, I went to work for Michael Katz, who already in those days, despite being only in his thirties, was a legend. From him, I learnt how to think like a corporate lawyer and saw at first hand every day, his profound knowledge of the law, his commitment to ongoing learning, his deeply honed instincts, even then in those early days, on the law and how it would be applied by courts and regulators, and the proper and appropriate way to advise clients – he was the inestimable and lofty benchmark, which I aspired to reach. He had another

trait which was key to my development – he wanted me to succeed and develop my own practice. These mentorships with highly successful commercial lawyers gave me the opportunity to show what I was capable of and the confidence in myself to deal with clients and colleagues and so progress my career.

Q *What, if any, hurdles did you have to cross in an industry that has traditionally been male dominated?*

A As I say, at that time, I was the only woman at our firm doing this work and I don't think that there was any other woman doing M&A work at any other of the large firms. I was certainly, for many years, the only woman partner at Edward Nathan. It is difficult to imagine now, just how unusual, not to say strange, it was for any woman to sit at the partnership table. At my first partners' meeting, all the partners (only men of course) stood up when I entered the room and were quite unsure how to behave in the presence of a woman not in the home but in the business. We were all learning our way, stumbling sometimes. I know that certainly some of the partners then were not convinced that having a woman partner was the right direction for the firm and were very apprehensive about this, but, having been outvoted, they treated me with respect, following the example of our wonderful senior partner Victor Mansell, a gentleman always to all. Over the years, I think that they learnt that this exotic creature in the boardroom was no different to them.

Of course, there were the times (even into the 1980s when I already had more than a decade of experience in M&A work) when the men (there were only men of course with whom I interacted in those

days) on the other side on a matter, would call me “sweetie” and “luvvie”, sometimes unthinkingly but sometimes purposely to try to put me off my stride or to denigrate my advice in the eyes of my client. I always tried to keep my cool, remind myself that the client's interests should not be affected by my reacting personally. I would inevitably be asked to pour the tea although I was into my thirties, which I did out of politeness, but not without sometimes steaming internally when there were men present younger than me, who were never treated in that way. In saying this, I feel awkward in highlighting what were, looking back, were really mere pin pricks, because black lawyers at the same time had so much harder a passage. So many others, women and men, black and white, were denied the opportunities which were opened up to me. As I say, I was extremely lucky to be given the opportunity to be able to show what I was capable of and throughout my career to have been given the support of my firm and partners

Q *What advice would you give to young woman looking to enter the M&A market?*

A Firstly, don't assume that M&A is glamorous and therefore the only law that you want to aspire to do. You should aspire to develop a career in a field which is suited to you and to your skills. M&A is not for everyone.

Secondly find a lawyer who is very successful in that field and try to persuade her or him to mentor you, in particular by allowing you to shadow her or him. Choose someone who will want you to flourish and develop your own practice. 🙌