

AN INTRODUCTION TO MY MENTOR

My first day on the job for John Hill was also his first day in office. I reported to his seventh-floor conference room for the kickoff meeting of all division chiefs and assistant chiefs—I was assistant chief of the then Consumer Protection and Anti-Trust Division—only to find my way blocked by the guardian of the inner sanctum, a veteran employee who had parlayed her job as switchboard operator into the enforcer of public decorum in the attorney general’s office. She backed against the double doors to the conference room, spread her arms, and barked at me, “You can’t go in there. They’re having a meeting of division chiefs.” After I persisted in requesting that John settle this dispute, he was summoned and assured her it was all right, that I belonged in the meeting. She grudgingly allowed me through the doors.

That incident reflects the culture of the attorney general’s office, and much of the state, in 1973. The switchboard operator, in her years at the attorney general’s office, had never seen a female attorney in an administrative position, much less a female attorney in a pants suit. There had been only a handful of female attorneys on the 100-member staff, and most had been much older than I. I was just three years out of the University of Texas law school, where I was one of only 18 females in a graduating class of 309.

I was not the only symbol of the many changes John’s administration brought to the attorney general’s office, a place generally considered a typical low-key state agency with career employees not infrequently hired because of their sponsorship by a powerful legislator or major political donor. Of the eleven division chiefs at that meeting in January 1973, five were new faces. The staff was brimming with freshly minted lawyers, male and female alike, who went on to lead divisions and eventually law firms. However short on experience some of us were, we all were long on enthusiasm and anticipation to work with the new attorney general of Texas. John’s recruiting spanned both sides of the legal aisle, plaintiff and defense attorneys alike, some of whom he had met as adversaries and others, like myself, through word of mouth.

As he gathered us together in that first staff meeting in his seventh-
