

## LEGAL TENDER ... by ellen m. keiley

INSIGHTS AND TIPS FROM LEGAL PROFESSIONALS

**EK:** How did you decide to become a lawyer?

**FIELDS:** After graduating from college in 1986, I had no interest in more school. I came across the book, "Ogilvy on Advertising" by David Ogilvy, and imagined, romantically, a "Mad Men" career like his in that field. But nobody would give me a job. So I ended up getting a paralegal job at a big Wall Street firm in New York and spent a year there. The paralegals, all recent college graduates, had a great time, but the lawyers there were uniformly miserable.

In any case, I thought that with the right environment, the practice of law could be pretty interesting. So as a leap of faith, I decided to become a lawyer.

**EK:** What practice areas do you focus on?

**FIELDS:** My practice is exclusively domestic relations: about 50

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percent divorce mediation and 50 percent divorce litigation, mostly for high-net-worth individuals and couples. In addition, I have served as an arbitrator on family law matters on several occasions and have a family law appellate practice.

**EK:** Tell me about your firm and your plans for the future.

**FIELDS:** We are a five-attorney boutique practice focusing on legal issues as they relate to families — divorce, estate planning and probate litigation. We envision expanding in the next year or so in the area of probate litigation.

**EK:** Can you talk about your professional involvement and accomplishments?

**FIELDS:** Chief justice of the Trial Court Paula Carey recently appointed

JONATHAN  
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me to the Child Support Guidelines Review Committee, a group charged with recommending revisions to the state Child Support Guidelines. I am also a fellow to the American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers. Most recently, I

wrote a chapter for a new MCLE publication, "The Financial Aspects of Divorce," on trusts and inheritances in divorce.

**EK:** Favorite novel?

**FIELDS:** "Bleak House" by Charles Dickens — particularly the plot line involving the century-long probate litigation, *Jarndyce v. Jarndyce*, which only ended when the estate ran out of money to pay the lawyers.

**EK:** Favorite film?

**FIELDS:** "Annie Hall"

**EK:** Hobbies?

**FIELDS:** Reading and movies

**EK:** If you had to choose a different profession, what would it be?

**FIELDS:** Screenwriter

**EK:** Is there anything you can share that might surprise others?

**FIELDS:** I lived with my family in Florence, Italy, for seven years from the age of 5 to the age of 12.

**EK:** What are the two biggest insights you have about the practice of family law?

**FIELDS:** Both of these took me quite a few years to learn. First, that the psychodynamics of the parties drive the outcomes more than the substantive law. To mistake a divorce negotiation for just another business deal not only misses the point of what the clients are experiencing, it compromises your ability as a lawyer to help the client successfully navigate the process. Second, in interviewing potential clients, it's a two-way street. You're interviewing them, too. The fact that they can pay the retainer isn't the end of the inquiry. Trust your instincts. **MLW**

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