

Chief Justice Miriam Shearing

- In Her Honor

By: Mae Flennoy, Communications Director / Nevada Lawyer Editor



Editor's Note: Some information for this article was taken from the video tribute produced by the State Bar of Nevada.

*C*hief Justice Miriam Shearing, a charismatic leader and unassuming pioneer, has worked her way right into the history books as a branding iron of historical precedents.

When she exits the court at the end of 2004, she'll leave behind a legacy of firsts that paved the way for many others in the legal profession.

Gutsy, gritty, and uncompromising may not be the words that immediately rush to mind when meeting up with this soft-spoken petite powerhouse. But that's exactly the picture her loved ones paint in a video tribute honoring the life and



L to R: Chief Justice Shearing as a child; as a nurse in the play "Harvey;" with her husband; on trampoline with daughters; and in h

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career of the Chief Justice. A room full of State Bar members and guests watched the emotional video tribute at the dinner honoring the Chief Justice during the Annual Convention in Coronado in June.

"If you want to know who Justice Shearing really is, you've got to start with Finnish," says Dr. Steven Shearing, her husband of 50 years. "Finnish was her first language. If you learn any Finnish, you learn at 6-years-old, 'sisu,' which is somewhere between grit and guts and a sort of stubbornness to keep marching come what may. She's a tough Fin."

The couple was married while attending Cornell University and visited Las Vegas during a hitchhiking tour of the country. They decided not to stay, as Mrs. Shearing predicted, "this place ain't never going to last," Dr. Shearing recalled.

After graduating from Cornell, the Shearings visited Berlin, and then a young Mrs. Shearing went on to law school at Boston College. Their next move would be to Las Vegas, where she took the Bar exam and opened a private practice in 1969.

In 1977, Miriam Shearing was the first woman elected to the bench as justice of the peace for Clark County.

"It was her commitment to equal access to the justice system and a fair and competent resolution of all disputes for everyone, regardless of their background, gender or their condition of life [that made her successful], says Nevada Supreme Court Justice William Maupin. "I see her exercising quiet, but very firm, very effective leadership, not just for women, but for everyone."

There was one consistent message that resonated throughout the video tribute and that is the Chief Justice's



"She was polite to people and listened to people. Some lawyers might think that was a weakness. To me, it was an attribute. Then she would make a fair and no-nonsense decision."

- Don Tingey, Esq.

ability to be fair. One after the other, friends and colleagues shared their own perspectives on the contributions that Chief Justice Shearing has made during her 27 years on the bench and 35 years in the legal profession.

"You can't find a more honest person; one who will

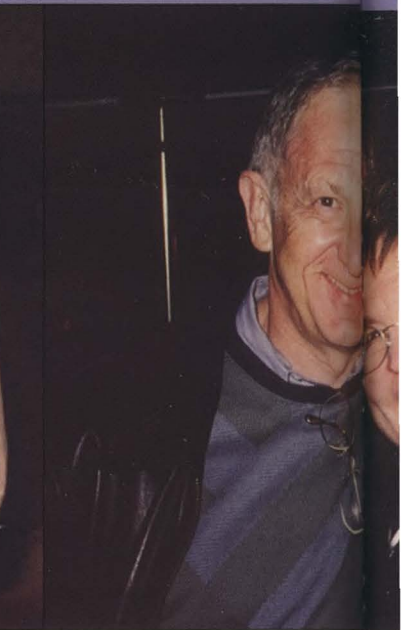




Chief Justice Shearing early in her career



Chief Justice Shearing with Sandra Day O'Connor



Dr. Shearing

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Top - Senator Hillary Clinton with Chief Justice Shearing.



Bottom - Justices Shearing, Cliff Young and Myron Leavitt.

vote for her convictions, who has a brilliant legal mind, and tremendous writing capacity," says Supreme Court Justice Nancy Becker. "Those are the things you need in a judge and especially a Supreme Court Justice."

In 1982, Chief Justice Shearing became the first woman elected as a District Court Judge in Nevada, serving 10 years on the Clark County bench. As a district judge, she served as chief judge and was elected president of the Nevada District Judges Association.

Chief Justice Shearing enjoys the honor of receiving the Distinguished Jurist Award from the Nevada Judges Association. The mother of three children, Robert, Leslie and Laurie, Chief Justice Shearing also has been honored as Professional Mother of the Year and Woman of the Year in Law.

In 1992, Nevada would welcome her as the first woman to sit on the state Supreme Court. In 1997, she found herself with the title of first again, when she became Chief Justice.

"She has been an inspiration to everyone, not only to women attorneys and members of the judiciary," says Pat Flanagan, State Bar of Nevada



Chief Justice Shearing



Sen. Richard Bryan, Justices Maupin and Shearing



Chief Justice Shearing and Grandchild

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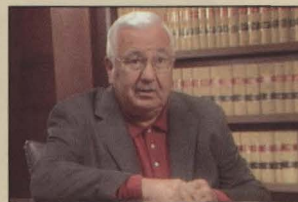
immediate-past president. "Milestones are the markers in a journey that measure the progress we've made. Chief Justice Miriam Shearing has set and exceeded many of these milestones."

Growing up on a farm in rural New York, Chief Justice Shearing didn't have many role models, especially not in the profession she would eventually choose.

"She set the example in the way she carried herself; the way she practiced; her personal demeanor; her professional demeanor," says Sylvia Bell of the Clark County Juvenile Court. "She showed us that you can be a professional, you can pursue your career and go on to the bench, and also have a family. She showed us there was a different way. These were things not available to us in 1978."

Chief Justice Shearing modestly attributes her success to Nevada citizens who focused on her credentials rather than her gender.

"I got the positions through election, not appointment," she says. "I was told by some county commissioners that women don't belong on the court. I just realized I had to do it another way — through the election process. The people of Nevada were very receptive of having a woman on the bench. I've learned that obstacles aren't as great as they may seem." ■



"Miriam has been a reliable and steady leader on the Nevada Supreme Court. She really cares about people who come before the court. They are not just names on paper; they are real live people and real live businesses."

- Justice Robert Rose

"I hope the state of Nevada understands her departure from the court will be felt in a significant way. She brought so much in terms of her common sense, practicality and her sincere and honest interest in the proper disposition of every case that comes before us. I feel honored to have worked with her, to know her, and count her as a good friend."



- Justice Deborah Agosti