

**Q: Why do you think it is important to celebrate International Women's Day/Month?**

**A:** To be brutally honest (and the irony of what I am about to say does not escape me), I have wholly mixed feelings about IWD. I have long said: the day we stop talking about equality is the day we achieve it. By the same token, whilst it is entirely right that we applaud women's achievements, it saddens me, we still have to have this one day every year in which we still have to bang the drum, ever louder, about equality, gender pay gaps and breaking the bias. This should all be a given. That it is not, in particular across the professions (where we really ought to know better) is actually a disgrace. And don't get me started on the lauding of "strong women". We never hear plaudits for "strong men", never mind "independent" ones. I do think that IWD has a particular relevance and importance with regard to countries like Saudi-Arabia, parts of the sub-continent and, of course, Afghanistan, raising awareness of the very real abuses and denials of opportunity being perpetrated, with woefully insufficient Western intervention.

**Q: What was your journey to get to where you are now?**

**A:** My "journey" was basically a series of accidents and coincidences. I never wanted to be a lawyer. I actually wanted to go to drama school and act (and no, I don't think that there are any real parallels between the two professions). I was persuaded by my parents to get a degree, to give me "something to fall back on", if the thespian trajectory proved to be - well - a downward one. My family are Armenian and came to London in the late 1950s and for them education was paramount. A law degree for the 18 year old me fell into the "boring but useful" category. So off I went to university (the first in my family to do so), with ambitions to star in endless student productions and then get snapped up by a grateful agent. Of course, none of that happened. In 3 years, I clocked up a grand total of two blink-and-you'd -miss me appearances in student plays and an awful lot of parties. Fear, rather than driving ambition, was my only motivation to do any work, so I left Cambridge with a solid, unremarkable 2.1 and no real idea about what to do next. Bar school seemed like a good idea, because I could at least be a student for another year and clock up some more parties. I could say that the rest is history. But it wasn't really. I had an awful time getting and being in pupillage, and 2 unsuccessful attempts at tenancy. This is an experience I touched on in my report "Voices of Women at the Chancery Bar; my first taste of failure and my first experiences of overt discrimination.

I think that if it wasn't for the support of Jane Giret QC (see below) my career would never have taken off. With her support, I discovered that I was actually quite good at this law stuff and that, remarkably, some of it was actually quite interesting.

**Q: What challenges have you faced as a woman in the industry, and how have you overcome them?**

**A:** I have had particular difficulties in my family life. My first husband died after a long illness when I was 45, when my children were 13 and 15. My son has cerebral palsy and is a wheelchair user needing 24-hour care. For the last 6 years of my husband's life I was



**MARCIA SHEKERDEMIAN QC**


Barrister  
**Wilberforce Chambers**

Marcia Shekerdeman QC is a barrister at Wilberforce Chambers specialising in insolvency and restructuring law and a senior consultant at McDermott Will & Emery LLP. She also sits in the High Court as Deputy Judge of the Insolvency and Companies Court. She is a past chair of the Chancery Bar Association's E&D subcommittee and the author of its 2021 report "Voices of Women at the Chancery Bar".


**INTERNATIONAL  
WOMEN'S  
DAY**

**ThoughtLadies that inspire**





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the sole-breadwinner (to be clear, I am not suggesting that there wasn't a decent amount of "bread" at the Chancery Bar) and took the last year out to care for him at home. Things were extraordinarily difficult for me. But I was so lucky. My chambers, my clerks and my clients were fantastically supportive, both before and after my husband's death. As a consequence, I was able to rebuild my practice with relative ease and my core client relationships were sustained. It is because of that support, to a great extent, that I came to realise that which really ought to be obvious. That kindness and compassion not only have a real place in the working world, but are also crucial components of a successful, nurturing - and happy - working environment.

**Q: What women have supported or inspired you throughout your career and why?**

**A:** The wonderful, late, great Jane Giret QC. She was a star of the insolvency and company bar, with an unconventional route to the profession (for a start, she had not been to University). She was my pupil supervisor in my 3rd six and started working on building me my fledgling insolvency practice from day 1. Giving me her returns, pushing me physically into the clerks' room, introducing me to her clients and most of all teaching me to be brave and to enjoy sticking my head above the parapet. Back in the mid 1980s, before International Women's Day was a "thing", she was out there, breaking the bias. The other magnificent woman is my friend and colleague Lexa Hilliard QC - a fantastic lawyer and a truly loyal friend who has supported and mentored countless women in our field, including me. She also makes me laugh. A lot. (With her, not at!)

**Q: It's 2022, how can we move forward in the industry to raise awareness against bias and take further action for equality?**

**A:** I am writing this piece the day after Madeleine Albright died. She of course famously coined the phrase "There is a special place in hell for women who don't help other women". I long since adopted this as my mantra. My experience, sadly (and not just my own but also those of the very many women I have worked with, trained or mentored) is that we absolutely don't help each other enough. We talk the talk, without walking the walk. What I mean is real, practical help and support, be it in career development or pastorally. Let's take an obvious example of what can be done: women solicitors - please make a conscious effort to instruct women barristers (and not just as juniors at the swampy end of the Counsel team). Don't assume that the male barrister will be more "aggressive" (good in men, bad in women) or that the client would prefer a man. Put together teams that are diverse and inclusive. Senior women, reach out to junior female colleagues: are they OK? Do they have enough work? Too much work? Senior women have to lead by example. We have some trailblazers. But not enough of them.

