

PUBLICATION

That is the Telling Thing: An Interview with Jenna Bedsole

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In addition to her credits as attorney and author, Baker Donelson Labor and Employment Chair and Birmingham Shareholder Jenna Bedsole can now add filmmaker to her list of accomplishments. Jenna is the executive producer and director of a feature film documentary on the life and legacy of one of Alabama's first female attorneys – Nina Miglionico. In "Stand Up, Speak Out – The Nina Miglionico Story," Jenna brings to the screen a fascinating look at "Miss Nina" and how this lady helped shape the future of Birmingham, Alabama. Using historical footage of Miss Nina interspersed with interviews of those who knew her or followed in her footsteps, the film's first half is devoted to the life of this Depression-era female attorney who became an outspoken proponent of civil rights for all and a member of Birmingham's first City Council. The second half of the film looks at Miss Nina's legacy and how the women who came after her have transformed the State of Alabama.

The film's promotional clip ends with Miss Nina's quote: "It's great to be first, to be 'one', but it's the two and three and four that come after you that is the telling thing." This quote seems to be part of the inspiration behind Jenna's filmmaking. I recently interviewed Jenna about the documentary:

Q: What was the genesis of the idea for a film about Nina Miglionico?

Jenna: In January 2013 the Alabama State Bar Association sent out an email to alumni of the Leadership Forum requesting volunteers to prepare short videos on inductees into the Alabama State Bar Lawyer's Hall of Fame. The only woman being inducted was Nina Miglionico. After doing some reading about Miss Nina, I volunteered to do the video. Organizers told me that the film should be no more than 3-4 minutes in length. It did not take much research to realize that this was far too little time for a woman who accomplished so much. This began the feature film that is Stand Up, Speak Out.

Q: How did you go about researching the life of Miss Nina?

Jenna: The research started with collections at the University of Alabama School of Law and the Birmingham Public Library. Fortunately, many of Miss Nina's papers had been saved and donated. In addition, the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute, UAB, and Nina Miglionico's long-time law partner, Sam Rumore, have provided audio and video for the film. Some of this video has footage of Miss Nina retelling some of the more vivid events that occurred during the civil rights struggle.

Q: What were some of the most interesting things you learned about Miss Nina?

Jenna: When Nina Miglionico graduated from law school in 1935, she was one of only a few women attorneys in Alabama. In one interview she relates the story that when the criminal law professor was about to lecture on the crime of rape that the women were asked to leave the classroom. Even more surprising is that women were not allowed to serve on juries. It was 1966 before the State of Alabama allowed women to serve as jurors. Nina Miglionico was a witness to and a participant in some of the most tumultuous events of the 20th century – the Great Depression, World War II, the Civil Rights movement and the women's movement. In one of her interviews, Nina talks about the time a cross was burned on the front lawn of her home and then talks

about the day her father told her a bomb had been left on the doorstep, but the 80-year old had "taken care of it."

Q: What was the biggest surprise about filmmaking?

Jenna: How similar filmmaking is to being a litigator. Being a litigator is like being a storyteller. However, there is a big difference – a good lawyer prepares the witnesses but a good filmmaker must catch the witness by surprise. When initially working on the film, I would pre-interview some of the subjects so that by the time cameras were rolling, their reactions and emotions on remembering past events were lost. Capturing those expressions is key to good filmmaking.

Q: What is the biggest lesson you take away from this experience?

Jenna: The importance of remembering the past in light of how far we have come. As a law student at the University of Alabama I would walk past the composite photographs of law students from years gone by, not focusing on the fact that as the decades went by the number of women and people of color represented declined until there was only a sea of white men. Miss Nina and those who came after her have paved the way for women and minorities to access the courtroom as lawyers, judges and jurors.

Q: When do you expect the film to be complete and how will it be distributed?

Jenna: Our goal is to have final edits done by early July 2015. We would like to distribute through film festivals such as Sundance, South by Southwest, Tribeca and Sidewalk, locally. Alabama Public Television has also expressed interest.