

# KAREN GIFFEN

**Partner and Co-founder, Giffen & Kaminski**

**Age:** 50

**In brief:** When Karen Giffen was first getting her feet wet in the practice of law, she met face to face with an old boys club. "At the time, 20 years ago, there were fewer women litigators," she recalls. "You could walk into a courtroom and be the only woman there." Today, as a partner in a woman-owned law firm on the top floor of a downtown office building with a great view of the lake, she says the profession has become more inclusive.

**Setting her sights high (and low):** Born in Ellwood City, Pa., the daughter of a minister, she aspired to be either an astronaut or archeologist.

**Sweet nothing:** "A lawyer who was sitting across from me in a deposition — I won't say his name; he's retired — kept calling me 'sweetie.' I did not correct him. ... And can you tell I regret it? I was a brand new lawyer at the time. I was very upset about the whole thing."

**Change of place:** "I don't walk into work any more thinking, *How am I going to be out of place?*"

**Strike while the iron is hot:** She and Kerin Kaminski decided to start their own firm about five years ago, when they were both 45 years old. "If we didn't do it then, we weren't going to ever do it."

**Leading the pack:** Giffen has a border collie, Dash, whom she used to practice in herding trials. "You've probably seen in movies where the shepherd whistles or gives commands and the dog leads sheep. I got to tramp about in fields with big rubber boots and a shepherd's pole. When I rescued Dash, he was 9 months old. Unless I had him active, he was going to destroy my home. He's up in years now."

**Animal lover:** For her 50th birthday this year, Giffen's friends gave her a trip to Machu Picchu and the Inca Trail. She created a travel itinerary to visit places such as the Galapagos Islands and the Peruvian Amazon to observe animals and wildlife.

**Most rewarding case?** A woman was rejected from being on a heart-transplant list. Giffen argued she shouldn't have been rejected, got her back on the list, and the woman got a heart. "What's odd about that story is it's very far from what I am doing now, but, gosh, I felt good after that."

**Lawyer discrimination:** Giffen went into an antique store in Holmes County a few years ago and saw a sign hanging on a piece of furniture: Remember to shoot the lawyers first. "I looked around, and I said, 'Why?' Of course, I didn't buy anything from this store, but it was jarring."

**Why the bad rep?** "I don't know that lawyers have done as good a job of making sure the integrity of the profession is maintained to its highest standard. [And] ... lawyers remind people of difficulty. Most people don't remember the lawyer that counseled them on how to set up a 401(k). They remember lawyers because of divorce," Giffen explains.

**TV peeve:** "When I watch lawyer programs on TV, I find myself getting upset because they're not like real life: 'What do you mean? You can't ask that question! No judge would ever let you ask that question!'"

**Favorite pastime:** Being an avid consumer of political news.

**Lofty goals:** In the next few years, Giffen would like to teach, most likely some sort of higher education. But "my travel goal is to go to the Himalaya region," she admits.

**Music to her ears:** "Until college, I had not lived in a city. I really liked the culture here. At the time, I used to go to rock concerts at the Agora. I loved Aerosmith all the way back to Steppenwolf."

— SARAH FILUS

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