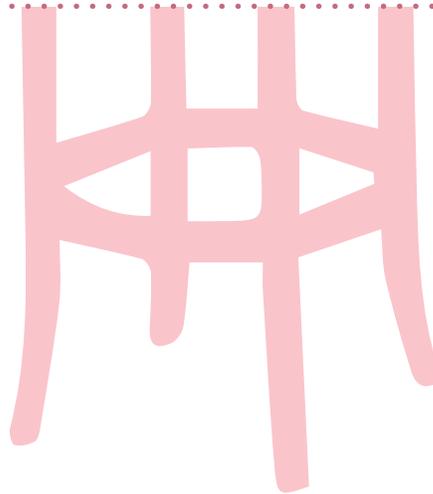




NOTHING LIKE A DAME

By Dona Kahn



Recently, at the memorial service for Robert Kendall, a longtime Philadelphia lawyer, I recalled an act of discrimination against women on the part of the Marriott Hotel in the summer of 1970, which was resolved with Bob's help. It's difficult to believe that it was not so long ago in the scheme of things, and that even today women suffer such affronts on a daily basis.

My good friend Pat Kendall and I were shopping in Saks Fifth Avenue on City Line Avenue that morning, and decided to have lunch at the Marriott nearby. Standing in line to get a table, we heard the maitre d' tell two men in front of us there would be a 15-minute wait for a table, but they could sit at the bar while waiting. We stepped up, gave our names and said we wanted a table for two and would wait at the bar.

"I am sorry," said the maitre d', "unescorted women cannot be served at the bar." We demanded to know why and were simply told it was Marriott's policy. Needless to say, we left without waiting for a table.

When I informed my husband of what happened, he said he understood why Marriott had such a policy. It was most likely to keep the bar from becoming a place to pick up a prostitute. I decided my husband was not sufficiently enlightened, so I called Pat's husband, Bob, who helped me draft a letter to the Marriott. He suggested we have another attorney sign the letter, saying that in our opinion Marriott's policy was a violation of the Pennsylvania Human Rights Act. The Marriott promptly responded, explaining the reasons for its policy, the principal one being to protect unescorted women from the "unwelcome advances of well-intentioned businessmen and conventioners" and to preserve the "family atmosphere" of

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the bar. After an exchange of several letters, drafted by me with Bob’s help, we received a letter in July 1970, from the Marriott’s attorney who, after referring to the original incident as a “misunderstanding,” informed us that the hotel realized that it “must keep up with the times,” and that any previous policy that would have inhibited my freedom to circulate through all the facilities of the hotel was no longer in effect. The use of the word “misunderstanding” was certainly a mischaracterization. Marriott understood full well that women not escorted by men were being perceived as possible prostitutes and clearly were

not welcome at its hotels.

The policy of the hotel was changed nationwide and a footnote to this incident is somewhat amusing. At that time I was a trial attorney for the Department of Agriculture.

I tried antitrust and unfair trade practice cases against companies and others in the livestock industry. Periodically I traveled to other parts of the country to try a case. In the fall of 1970, I went to Atlanta and after spending a long day preparing witnesses, we went to the Marriott for dinner. One of the witnesses told us his brother-in-law was the manager of the Windjammer Lounge at the hotel

and we would get VIP treatment. We were indeed treated well (drinks on the house) and when I noted to the manager that it seemed to be a popular place to dine, he replied, “Oh, yes, it has really been hopping for the last few months. Some dames in Philadelphia opened up the bar to women and we are now packed every night.” I decided not to volunteer that I was one of those “dames.” ■

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