

## Q & A > department

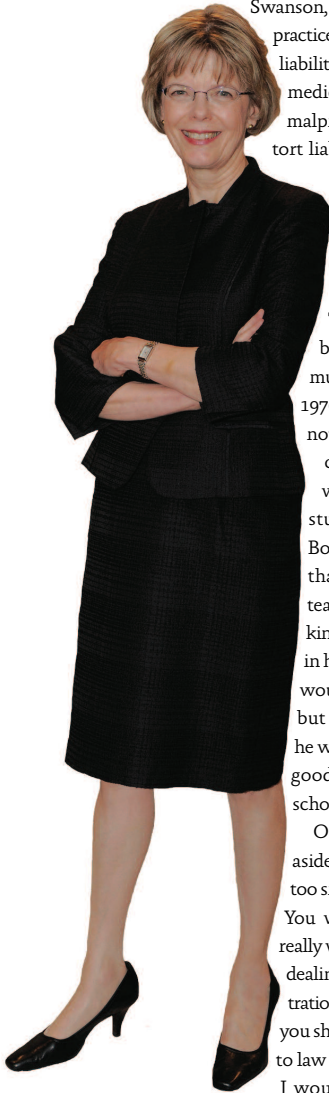
**Kay L. Schichtel**

**Age:** 60

**Family:** She and her husband, Barry Lesht, have two daughters, Alison, 27, and Deanna, 25.

**Education:** She graduated from Kalamazoo College in 1971 and the University of Chicago Law School in 1974.

**Profession:** A fellow of the American College of Trial Lawyers, she is a founding partner of Swanson, Martin & Bell. Her practice focuses on product liability defense, drugs and medical devices, medical malpractice and general tort liability.



**1. Why did you become a lawyer?**

Because I didn't want to be a teacher. That's probably a bit glib, but not too much. Back in the early 1970s, there really were not a lot of acceptable career options for women. I was doing student teaching in Boston, and the man that I was student teaching for was the kind of teacher you had in high school who you would sort of dread but really liked because he was strict and he was good and he was old school.

One day he took me aside and said, "You are too smart to be a teacher. You will never get paid really well, and you will be dealing with the administration all the time. I think you should consider going to law school." ... I decided I would take the LSATs

without having studied for them, and, if I did well enough, then I would apply, and if I applied and I got in then maybe I would go. All of those things happened and the next thing I knew I was at the University of Chicago Law School. Why did I become a lawyer? By accident.

The irony is that in trying a case a lot of what you are doing is teaching the jury, and I like it.

**2. What's your last case or matter that you can discuss, and what did it entail?**

The kind of work that I do, which is mostly to defend doctors and hospitals in medical malpractice cases, doesn't lend itself very well to describing specific cases because I will be describing specific patients and I will be describing specific institutions and doctors. So I don't really feel comfortable doing that. I can say that what I like about certain cases is that it gives me an opportunity to learn a little bit about things that I would never have had any reason to learn about otherwise, such as, I had a recent case that ended up involving medication administration practices and procedures, complex congenital heart anomalies, brain-imaging MRI and ultrasounds, and genetic abnormalities, all rolled into one case. Those cases are fascinating, regardless of how they turn out for one side or another.

**3. If you could have lunch with anyone, living or dead, who would it be and why?**

My father.

He died about 10 years ago and I miss him, but also because there are things we didn't have a chance to talk about that I would like to talk to him about. I have been going to a World War II group reunion with my mother the last few years after my father passed away. He was in the 73rd Bomb Wing and was stationed in Saipan and was a left gunner on a B-29 and I got to meet four members of his crew and hear stories about the war and my dad and their experiences that I never talked to him about.

He didn't talk about the war. They were just a bunch of high school graduates, or maybe not high school graduates, who stepped out of whatever they were doing and were put in a position where it was sort of remarkable what they accomplished. Besides, I just miss my dad. I grow more like him every day.

**4. What advice do you have for new or future lawyers?**

Don't forget your personal life. Being a lawyer can take tremendous amounts of time and energy, but your personal life, which is relationships, family, pets, interests, hobbies, are the things that are really going to turn out to be, in

the end, the most important to you. Even if you love the law, if you are doing something else that takes you away from that, it gives you a better perspective.

You will come back to your work, I think, with a clearer mind, more of a sense of balance, maybe more of a sense of humor, which will take you a long way toward being happy in your work.

**5. Describe one of your hobbies.**

The hobby that takes up most of my time and my money is that I have a horse. When my daughters were old enough to decide that they wanted to learn to ride I decided that I really didn't want to drive to Naperville from Hyde Park to sit in the car, so I started riding. Aside from having my daughters, which I don't consider a hobby, I think it was one of the better things I ever did, because it was completely different from practicing law, and yet similar. Because when you are trying a case you really can't think about anything but that case, just ask my husband. And if you are riding a horse you really can't be thinking about anything else other than riding a horse. It's a complete switch of concentration, and I just like being around horses. ...

**6. What was your favorite childhood vacation?**

Vacation for me generally involved a road trip to western Kansas to visit my grandparents. One of the fun things about it that I remember: one time staying in a motel where they had teepees and my sister and I got to sleep in a teepee. I remember we went for harvest and, appallingly in retrospect, we were allowed to ride in the back of the truck where the grain was coming down. Heaven knows what we were breathing in. It was so dirty and so much fun. It was so dangerous. We got to see the cows. Every summer we would try to tame the barn kittens, and it would never work. It was an annual project.

**7. What is your favorite Chicago restaurant?**

Piccolo Mondo in Hyde Park. We go at least every two weeks. The food is good and all the waiters know our names and we know their names. We sit down, and they hand us a glass of wine. It's very pleasant. If it's not on the menu but it used to be they will fix it for me. If it's not on the menu and it never was they will try. ■

By Olivia Clarke