

## The First 50 Women in Idaho Law

### **PATRICIA L. McDERMOTT** **August 19, 1966**



**Patricia L. McDermott** was born on February 19, 1938 in Washington, D.C. to Peter A. and Emily (Wolfe) McDermott. Her father was born in Ireland and, after coming to the United States attended the University of Idaho and, later, law school at George Washington University in Washington, D.C. Her parents married in December 1936, while her father was in law school. When McDermott was born, her father was in his final year of law school and her mother worked as a nurse. Upon her father's graduation from law school, in August 1938, the family moved to Pocatello. A few years later, McDermott's brother, Peter McDermott, Jr., was born.

McDermott grew up and went to school in Pocatello, graduating from Pocatello High School in 1954, a year early because she skipped her junior year. While in high school, McDermott worked in her father's law office and learned that she loved the law and decided to pursue it as her profession.

McDermott started her college studies at Idaho State University, primarily because it was close to home. However, her studies took her to Creighton and the University of Idaho, before returning to Idaho State to graduate with a degree in political science in 1958. Immediately thereafter, McDermott began law school at George Washington University in Washington, D.C. During law school, she worked for Senator Frank Church from 1958-1961. McDermott finished law school in just over two years, graduating early in 1961. She immediately sat for and passed the Washington, D.C. Bar and worked in the Solicitor's Office of the U. S. Department of Labor from 1961-1964. Thereafter, McDermott also earned a Masters in labor law from Georgetown University and went to work as House Counsel for the United Planning Organization, a group created by the District of Columbia's Crime & Control Act to battle the "War on Poverty," from 1964-1965.

In late 1965 or early 1966, McDermott's father, a long-time practicing attorney in Pocatello and deputy prosecutor for a number of years, got sick and McDermott returned to Pocatello. Since she and her father always had a good relationship, McDermott decided to join his office and together they opened the firm of McDermott & McDermott. She was admitted in Idaho on August 19, 1966, and handled all types of matters and frequently found herself in court.

In 1968, McDermott's brother, Peter, graduated law school at the University of Idaho and joined the family's practice in Pocatello. (Peter Jr. later went on to become a Sixth District Court judge in Pocatello, where he serves today.) It was during this time that McDermott married Richard Bieber, whom the local newspapers were quick to note was a Republican.

McDermott served as Deputy Public Defender for the Sixth Judicial District from 1969-1972. During this time she became active in her local bar association, serving as the Secretary/Treasurer of the sixth District Bar Association in 1968.

McDermott is perhaps best known for her public service as a Democratic legislator from Pocatello for many years from 1969 through 1991 in the House, and for one term beginning in 1991 in the Senate. While in the House she served on the State Affairs, Judiciary, Rules & Administration, Ways and Means, Local Government and House Printing and Legislative Council Committees. She was the first woman in the Idaho Legislature to serve in a leadership position when she was named Minority Leader in the House of Representatives in 1975, and again in 1977. In this leadership position she worked with many people, including Beverly Bistline (No. 26).

McDermott's call to public service was likely influenced by her mother's involvement in the Democratic Party in Idaho. From 1960-62, McDermott's mother, Emily, served as the vice-chair of the Idaho State Democratic Party and as state registration chair of the Democratic Part in 1960. Emily's service and influence in politics continued for many years, including her being appointed by Governor Cecil Andrus as the first woman to the State Personnel Commission.

McDermott has long been active in the Pocatello community, serving on the Alumni Board of Directors of Idaho State University, as an instructor in Communications law at Idaho State University, and as a member of the Pocatello Bicentennial Commission. She has also been affiliated with St. Anthony's Council of Catholic Women Business and Professional Women's Club, Alpha Omicron Pi, Mortar Board, the League of Women Voters and on the Idaho Commission on the Status of Women (which was later renamed by the Legislature as the Commission on Women's Programs). For all her activities, McDermott was listed in *Outstanding Young Women in America* and *Who's Who of American Women*.

She has served on a number of Bar committees, including the Bar Examination committee.

In 1989, McDermott was given a Service Award by the Idaho State Bar for her many years of service in the Idaho Legislature and on behalf of the Sixth District Bar Association.

McDermott lives in Pocatello and continues to practice at the firm of McDermott & Zollinger.