

Apr. 4-84
MNNancy Mossip

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A busy life is a happy life for family law specialist

NOT FOR CIRCULATION

By JUDY HUGHES
Staff Writer

As the only lawyer in Mississauga who deals exclusively in family law, Nancy Mossip has accomplished two of the most important goals she set for herself when she received her degree in law.

On a daily basis, she helps dozens of clients overcome the barriers that male-favoring laws impose on women, and in the process has built up a highly successful law practice that some skeptics doubted could be done.

"Law school brought home to me the inequalities to women that are in our laws," said Mossip. "When I was called to the bar, I wanted to work primarily with women in family law."

Specializing in family law was not a direction most of her colleagues approved of. "They told me I wouldn't be able to make a living out of family law, that I'd have to get into real estate or corporate law," Mossip recalls. "It was nice to be able to prove them wrong."

The 35-year-old lawyer first became actively involved in women's rights when she was at Queen's University studying law. "I had my consciousness raised when I was in law school," Mossip remembered. Now, "I would definitely call myself a feminist."

While 80 to 90 per cent of Mossip's clientele is female, she says, "I work just as hard for my male clients. I tell them what it's reasonable to expect, that they're not going to be able to get away without paying support."

Mossip sees herself as "a fairly conciliatory lawyer," she said. "I don't tell them what they should want... I tell them when they're being unreasonable. Then I let them live their decisions."

It's fairly common, said Mossip, for recently separated men and women to be very bitter. "They can hardly wait to have their day in court so they can get



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even," she said. However, Mossip cautions those clients against trying to take their spouses "to the cleaner. They don't get even in court. An impartial third party makes the decisions and then nobody gets what they want."

Advising her clients to try and avoid costly court proceedings has a direct effect on her pocketbook, but she says it's worth it. "That (court) is where lawyers make their money," she pointed out. "I don't make as much money as I could, but I have to live with myself."

The year before Mossip was called to the bar in 1979, the Family Law Reform Act was passed, bringing about some needed changes in divorce, separation, custody and support proceedings. "For a change young lawyers had an advantage over older lawyers," she laughed.

Mossip is looking forward to the proposed changes in divorce laws which would allow divorce on one ground only — marriage breakdown and living apart for a

period of one year. "That's good. It will take away the concept of fault."

Mossip's family law practice is worlds apart from her private life. She and her husband of one year, Michael Balkwill, are expecting their first baby in about three months, and both are looking forward to moving to their new Georgetown home.

Having a baby "will mean a few lifestyle changes for Michael and me, personally, but it probably won't interfere too much with my practice," said Mossip.

"I expect I'll be back at work, at least part time, in about three weeks," she added. "I'm healthy, my career is very important to me, and I have the luxury of being able to afford a mother's helper when the baby comes."

VOLUNTEER WORK

Mossip also manages to squeeze a lot of volunteer work into her busy professional and home life. A founding member of Interim Place, the region's only emergency hostel for battered women and their children, Mossip served as its president for two years.

She also serves as president of the Mississauga chapter of Zonta International, a classified service organization for executive and professional women, as first vice-president of the Peel Law Association, and on the city's planning committee.

Mossip speaks to groups of women, particularly young women, whenever she has an opportunity, never accepting a fee for her services. "It's important for women who have the education to share it with other women," said Mossip. "Knowledge can be an incredibly powerful tool."

During the next few years, Mossip plans to raise her children ("I'll probably have two") and expand her law practice to include a full staff of family law practitioners. "If I can fit that in, I think I'll be happy."