

Rosalyn Sia Baker-Barnes

Capehart Photography

AALM: When did you decide to become a lawyer and why? What drove you to this career?

Baker-Barnes: Both of my parents had some connection with the law. My father was a prosecutor, in private practice and then became a judge. My mother was an officer and then held several supervisory roles with the probation and parole section of the Department of Corrections. And while law was always part of my life, I didn't decide to become a lawyer until I had nearly graduated from college. I always wanted to become a journalist, traveling all over the country. I majored in communication, interned in the governor's press office, worked for a newspaper and worked at a local TV station. I enjoyed reporting, but something was always missing. Becoming a lawyer gave me what I was missing – the ability to not only tell my client's stories, but more importantly, the ability to do something to help them get back on their feet.

AALM: What do you find challenging about your practice?

Baker-Barnes: The practice of law is a high stress job, particularly for me as a trial lawyer and litigator. In the beginning, it's about learning your craft and gaining confidence, celebrating successes and learning from failures. Now, in my 18th year, finding the time to meet my obligations is the most challenging aspect of my practice. As lawyers we're pulled in many directions, but we have to take time to take care of ourselves. This year, I have focused on taking time out each day to take care of myself – whether its exercise, a mind break or just enjoying a hobby.

AALM: How welcoming do you think the South Florida legal community is to women practitioners?

Baker-Barnes: I think the South Florida legal community has evolved; it continues to be more reflective of our community as a whole. We have great organizations in West Palm Beach that allow women practitioners to familiarize themselves with the legal community, gain support and mentorship and become involved. However, we still struggle with feeling welcomed and included in law firms, being promoted to partner, staying in the profession and serving as lead counsel

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at trial. I try to encourage women to get involved, and to actively seek out opportunity instead of waiting for opportunity to come to them. What I try to pass on are tools that I was provided by my own mentors, and they are goals that I still have to push myself to reach: (1) seek opportunity; (2) be prepared to take on challenges; (3) don't be afraid to fail; (4) when you do fail (and you will sometimes!), focus on the lesson in the failures; and (5) cherish the wins and enjoy the ride along the way!

AALM: Do you find that as a woman you face any challenges that men don't?

Baker-Barnes: Yes, I think that as women lawyers, one of the biggest challenges we face is not being taken seriously, and the perception that somehow because we are women, we are not tough enough to be successful. Because of those perceptions, I think we face more obstacles than men in generating business, earning a seat at the table and playing major roles in litigation and at trial. I think first, we have to believe in ourselves and refuse to let these perceptions stand in the way of our success. Next, we have to be vocal and seek out the opportunity to achieve, but with that comes the responsibility to be prepared and to be successful when we get that opportunity. I think the more we demonstrate that these are in fact just perceptions, not reality, and the more that potential clients and managing partners see the benefit we as women lawyers provide, we can help to minimize these stereotypes that can serve as obstacles to our success.

AALM: Tell us something about yourself that people would be surprised to learn.

Baker-Barnes: I travel just about every week for work, but I am terrified of flying on planes. I have learned tools to cope, like working and focusing on other things besides the flight, but, the smaller the plane, the harder it is for me to cope. Just another challenge I face all the time!

AALM: How do you balance your home life and work life?

Baker-Barnes: I think balancing work and home life is extremely difficult, if not impossible. So, I generally use the term "blending" work and home life because that is the only way I can try to be successful at both. I have three busy children, an active trial practice and I am involved in my local and legal community. I try to include my children in my community involvement, both as a way for us to spend time together and to teach them the importance of giving back. Ultimately, I think you have to consciously make time for

both, that means carving out family time first on your schedule, and then sticking to it. The process is often difficult, but the results are worth it. I believe that when we take time for our families, it makes us better lawyers and better people.

AALM: How are you involved in the legal and local community?

Baker-Barnes: I am a strong proponent of community involvement. I think it helps us stay connected, meet new people and learn about how we can assist those in need. Currently, I serve as president of the Palm Beach County Bar Association. My theme for this year is "You've Been Served: Lawyers Answering the Summons to Community Service." The focus is to highlight the positive impact that lawyers have in our communities and beyond. In my local community, I am a past president of the West Palm Beach Chapter of the Links, Incorporated, a national organization dedicated to community service. During my tenure, I helped to establish a program at a local elementary school called, "Planting Seeds for the Future," designed to emphasize the importance of diet and exercise, and help to prevent diabetes and heart disease. Over two semesters, the students developed their own exercise video and planted a dedicated vegetable garden on school grounds.

AALM: What accomplishment are you most proud of achieving?

Baker-Barnes: I have been privileged to represent many families following the unfortunate injury of their child due to medical negligence. In some cases, parents of young babies have been told that their children will never walk or live a normal life because of someone else's negligence. In prosecuting the cases on behalf of the children, I have been able to get the very best in medical care, therapy and assistance. With the right nursing care and educational assistance, they were able to push the limits and live full, active lives. Now, several of them are walking and reaching milestones their parents never thought they could achieve. These successes are the results of tireless work by both parents and children, with the support necessary to meet those goals. I am most proud of playing a small part in these victories.

AALM: What do you enjoy doing outside of work?

Baker-Barnes: Outside of work, I enjoy spending time with my family and sports. I started running a few years ago and play tennis as a hobby. My dad is responsible for me being a sports fanatic, he started taking me to



At a Glance

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Education

Juris Doctor, Florida State University,
2000
Bachelor of Arts in Communication,
Florida State University, 1996

Select Awards

Woman in the Law in Personal Injury
Litigation, Best Lawyers Magazine,
2017
Top Ten Black Female Attorney, Black
Enterprise Magazine, 2016
Top 20 Woman in Law, Daily Business
Review South Florida, 2014
Famous Female First, F. Malcolm
Cunningham, Sr. Bar Association,
2016
Nation's Best Advocates: 40 Under
40, National Bar Association and
IMPACT, 2011
South Florida Woman Extraordinaire,
Business Leader Media, 2011
Presidential Award, National Bar
Association, 2007
One of Palm Beach's 10 Successful &
Influential Black Professionals, Palm
Beach Journal, 2007

Tampa Bay Buccaneers games when I was a year old! We had season tickets and he was famous locally for being that dad that brought his baby daughter to the games. I still love attending sporting events and supporting my favorite teams, the Florida State Seminoles, Miami Heat and Tampa Bay Buccaneers!