

Story: MARY MUSE PROFILE (2 pages)

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Women who worry they can't do it all: Meet Mary Muse.

This El Dorado Hills family law attorney is a mother of seven, has practiced law for 35 years, worked in her family's real estate business and for more than 20 years served on the Buckeye Union and El Dorado Union High School boards of trustees. In her spare time, she traveled the world.

Now 62, with only one child still at home, she can look back on a life of accomplishment, but she's the first to acknowledge it wasn't always easy.

Muse and her husband, William Fisher, newly married, arrived in El Dorado County in 1973. She enrolled at McGeorge, had her first child as a student, her second a month after taking the bar exam, and her third – in three years – while working as a research attorney for the Superior Court of Placerville.

With her third pregnancy, she was “bewildered about how I was going to do it all” and sure she'd have to give up her job. But the judge she worked for wouldn't hear of it. “Why do you question it?” he asked her. “Of course you can do it.”

She has, but on her own terms. Early in her career, working for the Superior Court in Placerville, “I insisted on having flexibility,” she says. “I insisted on having what I needed.” She urges today's young women to do the same.

Women have been fighting since the 1960s for parity in the workplace, yet they are still shy about going after it, Muse says. “I am amazed at young women who haven't continued pushing.”

Muse chose to work, but she acknowledges that many women don't have that choice. “We in our country need to have more respect for parents who work,” she says. In her view, employers should allow parents – mothers and fathers – flexible schedules to be available for their children. Muse and her husband both volunteered in their kids' schools, and she served a family dinner every night.

Muse's commitment to family extends to her law practice. She didn't plan to specialize in family law. That was the traditional niche for women, she says, and she identified more with her father, who was a criminal defense lawyer in Boston. Then 15 years ago, a friend who practiced family law asked Muse to make a court appearance for her. Muse found she liked having a personal connection with clients and opened her own practice soon after.

Whether representing the wife or husband, Muse approaches each case as an opportunity to help a family get through a difficult time without bitterness or animosity. She prefers mediation as a means of keeping the lines of communication open.

"I have felt good," she says, "because with most of my cases, clients are moving on to a future this is right for them."

Forty years ago, as a Boston college graduate, Muse wouldn't have predicted her own right future as practicing family law in California. But here is where she was meant to be, helping women achieve the goals she's attained.

"I worked hard," she says. "But it's the women who haven't had the opportunities I've had, who are working and raising their children to the best of their abilities, who really command my respect."

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