THE "LADY IN PURPLE":
GLADYS TOWLES ROOT

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Gladys Towles Root Timeline
Gladys Towles Root was by all accounts a woman of extremes. Her four-foot hats, zeal for color in her eccentric wardrobe and hair, and her egg-sized jewelry, however, were only part of the picture. The other part of the picture contains a woman who was anything but ‘a little bit nuts’ as she once described herself. Gladys was a serious attorney who despite her outlandish appearance gained the respect and admiration of the majority of her peers at a time when women were rare on the legal scene. She also worked hard to earn the respect and trust of the people who should matter most to attorneys--her clients. Perhaps it was because Gladys herself was a misfit that she felt such compassion for the sex-crime defendants she gained notoriety for defending--those which she called the "loose spokes in the wheel of life." Your reaction to Gladys will probably be no less extreme than the woman herself--you will either love her or hate her. Perhaps, however, you may ultimately reach the point that I have after months of researching this colorful character--that you love her and hate her simultaneously for different reasons. The woman who once said, "I love to be flamboyant....[a]nd you should always live the way you are," is worthy of our respect for truly having lived her life according to the principles she held dear and for living her life with a vigor and zest which we could all learn from. In addition, she was a brilliant attorney whose work ethic and accomplishments are worthy of admiration. However, there is a darker side to the career of Gladys Towles Root--the side which you may quickly grow to hate. Gladys defended her sex-crimes clients with such vigor that she often trampled on the victims--indeed she believed so strongly in her clients that she rarely saw that victims existed at all. The repercussions of her actions in court were often the continued victimization of women and children--in a society and court system which made them victims to begin with. You may hate Gladys for using her womanhood against other women as I do, but Gladys cannot and should not be dismissed this easily.

Gladys' views of rape and 'ladyhood' were very much in par with the views of others in her period--and, in fact, are views still held by many in our society today. From Gladys, the mold-breaker, however, perhaps you were expecting more--admittedly, I was. Upon first reading about Gladys I was expecting her to be a modern feminist attorney before her time--this, of course, she was not. Despite this fact, I feel that Gladys has rightfully earned her place on the list of role models for modern women attorneys to learn from. Today, as during Gladys' time, there is pressure for women attorneys to "fit in" in a male dominated profession. The assumption is that if you cannot fit in, you cannot be a successful attorney. Gladys, however, proves that this assumption is wrong. She never tried to 'fit in' or act in a way that she thought society or her male colleagues would view as "appropriate." Gladys did not "look" like an attorney, nor did she sometimes "act" like one--yet she was still a very successful attorney. Gladys and her successful legal career are an important riddle to solve; from the life of Gladys Towles Root we may begin to find some answers on how to be both women and successful attorneys--on our own terms.

HOW GLADYS 'CHOOSE' CRIMINAL LAW
In 1930, fresh out of University of Southern California law school, Gladys opened a tiny law office in the financial district of Los Angeles. Despite her office's close proximity to the city's skid row, Gladys had no aspirations of practicing criminal law when she began her practice. In fact, one could easily say that nothing in Gladys' background predisposed her to criminal law—and especially the sex crimes cases she would become so famous for taking.

Gladys grew up in a protective, upper-class household on a wheat ranch—which is today covered by downtown Los Angeles. Coincidentally, Gladys was born in 1905, on the same day that California became a state. Gladys' mother, Clara Dexter Towles, hoped that Gladys would become an actress and encouraged her dramatic talents and eccentric fashion style throughout her life. Once, upon realizing that Gladys had failed to plan her wardrobe for a reception which Gladys herself had organized in honor of President Hoover on behalf of the young Republicans, Clara helped Gladys create an evening dress by pinning two Belgian lace tablecloths around her. Clara herself had had a less dramatic background than the one she wished for her daughter. She had worked as secretary to the speaker of the house of the Kansas state legislature prior to the family moving to California. Throughout Gladys' legal career Clara often accompanied Gladys on her excursions to distant jails and was generally fairly involved in Gladys' life. Gladys' father, Charles Towles, was equally protective of his daughter. Charles' own aspirations of becoming a lawyer were short lived when financial pressures interrupted his education. Instead of practicing law, he made a comfortable living working for the Singer Sewing Machine Company. Charles, however, hoped that his daughter would practice law. Before Gladys' parents left for their annual six-month European vacation, her father handed Gladys a check to take care of the rent on her law office for six months. Clearly, Gladys would never need to feel the financial pressures which Charles himself had felt early in his life.

Not only was there nothing in Gladys' background which predisposed her to the practice of criminal law, but also Gladys herself did not exactly 'choose' criminal law either. Rather, she merely stumbled into it. Gladys had dreamed of representing famous, high-paying clients. Louis Osuna, the small Filipino man who entered her office that first day, was a far cry from what Gladys had dreamed of—but he was a client and that is all that really mattered to the new attorney. Louis was merely out walking when he entered Gladys' building in order to escape the searing heat and blazing Los Angeles sun. He was walking because he needed to think and clear his head. He had recently found out that his wife was cheating on him. There, standing in the lobby of Gladys' building, he realized what he needed to do....it was time for a divorce. When he looked at the building directory in the lobby, there was the name of Gladys Towles Root, attorney at law. This is how Gladys received her first client. However, what started out as a divorce case took a rather shocking turn. Twenty-four hours after Gladys had met with her first client, Louis called his lady lawyer to find out whether his divorce was finished. Gladys, in response, told Louis that "[t]he
wheels of legal machinery turn slowly.\textsuperscript{3} The following day, Gladys received a telegraph from her client from the local jail. She rushed over to the jail, for what was to be her first jail visit, to find out what had happened to her client. It seemed that the simple divorce case Gladys had received approximately 48 hours earlier was now a murder case. Louis had found his wife and her lover in bed together; Louis shot at both of them. The lover escaped, but his wife was killed. Louis told his lady lawyer that he killed his wife because the divorce took too long. So, Gladys' first case ever was to defend Louis Osuna of a murder charge. Gladys saved Louis from the electric chair and got him a charge of manslaughter with a short sentence instead.

GLADYS' RISE TO GLORY

Within a month of gaining Louis Osuna as a client, fifteen other defendants had signed on as clients of Gladys Towles Root. It seems Louis Osuna was so impressed with his lady lawyer that he bragged about her to all the other inmates--emphasizing mostly that Gladys cared little about a client's ability to pay. Gladys became so popular among the downtrodden that a poem was written in her honor:

Root de toot.
Root de toot.
Here's to Gladys Towles Root.
Her dresses are purple, her hats wide
She'll get you one instead of five.\textsuperscript{4}

At first, Gladys received little monetary payment for her services; however, she did receive an abundance of chickens, ducks, and geese instead. From these humble beginnings of mostly chance and circumstance, Gladys built a successful legal practice. Gladys Towles Root's claim to fame is that she won more sex crimes cases than any lawyer in United States history--either male or female. She began taking sex crimes defendants because these were the clients which no other attorney wanted to take. Gladys, however, believed that everyone had a right to representation. Gladys built her practice up such that she averaged seventy-five courtroom appearances per month throughout her fifty-two year career; she maintained this rate even throughout two pregnancies. At one point her office was handling 1,600 cases a year; this is more criminal cases than any other private American law firm.

To house her successful practice, Gladys renovated an office in a style that was befitting for the "lady in purple." At 212 South Hill Street, the former location of the legendary Rainbow Saloon, stood Gladys Towles Root's office. The facade was black stone trimmed in gold. The remainder of the outside and inside of the building was filled with a brilliant purple color. The door was made of purple glass and Gladys' name appeared on the window in purple script trimmed in gold. Inside the building it was lined with plush purple carpeting--even the rugs,
furnishings, and drapes were done in the same purple color. The office consisted of fourteen rooms. Her law library was done in a sea-green color; her black marble bathroom contained a contour tub built to fit the bodily dimensions of Gladys herself. The office even contained a spacious dining room and kitchen. Clearly, this was not your typical lawyer's office, but then Gladys was not your typical attorney.

While the outside of her practice, like Gladys herself, was flamboyant and extreme, the heart of her practice was very much like the heart of Gladys Towles Root. Her practice was run and built by an amazing work ethic. Gladys worked an endless number of hours--usually no less than sixteen hours a day. These hours were not spent in idle either; Gladys worked the way she lived--wholeheartedly. Gladys poured her soul into every case--whether receiving payment for it or not. She employed investigators, researchers, psychiatrists, and scientists in order to cover all possible bases, in an era when such efforts were rare--especially on behalf of sex crimes defendants. She immersed herself in the study of subjects as complex as medicine, ink analysis, and forensic chemistry just to prepare herself for cross-examination of her opponents’ experts.

Gladys not only changed the individual lives of her clients, but she often ended up changing the laws in the process. One such case was when a Filipino man came to see Gladys because he wanted to gain the right to marry his Caucasian girlfriend, who was then pregnant with his child. Gladys, with her usual tenacity researched not only the law and the legislative history of the prohibitive statute, but also delved into genetics and racial definitions. From her tireless research Gladys was able to formulate an argument based on the improper classification of the Filipino race. The result was that Gladys was able to get the law declared unconstitutional--and her young couple was able to marry.

HOW BEING A WOMAN INFLUENCED GLADYS' CAREER

Success at the Expense of Other Women

Gladys defended her clients in sex crimes cases with great zeal and vigor. If she did not believe deeply in the innocence of her clients, she would not take their case. Clearly, the defense of sex crime offenses has great implications for women in general with rape being an all too familiar crime. A valid criticism of Gladys' achievements is that her success came at a great cost to other women--and to the advancement of women as a whole. As one lawyer poignantly stated in response to Gladys' extraordinary success rate in winning victories for her clients, "Yes, and a few of them even deserved it." Gladys promulgated and perpetuated views of rape which placed the blame on the women themselves and denied that many forms of rape were in fact rape at all. Gladys believed that there were only three major types of rape: the invited, the brutal attack, and the under-age copulation.
Gladys believed the brutal attack type of assault was as rare as one in ten thousand and she had a very limited view of what qualified as violent. In describing this type of rape she stated: "Here the woman has to be knocked unconscious or forcibly seduced, perhaps by a gang, and spread-eagled. The attacks usually occur late at night and are generally perpetrated by groups of boys ranging in years from seventeen to their mid-twenties who prowl the streets in cars. When they spot an intended victim they force her into their car at the point of a knife or a gun." This type of rape was the only type of rape which Gladys viewed as legitimate. Anyone who did not fall into this category, Gladys viewed as "innocent."

For the "invited" rape, Gladys blamed the victim. Because of the woman's clothing, appearance, and her location, she has asked to be raped. She said of the invited rape that it "begins with the fashion designers who started the style for capris, bikinis, and tight slacks." But, it is not the fashion designers who are most to blame, but rather the women who choose to wear these unacceptable items: "[i]nto these articles of clothing that either expose or accentuate the bodily curves and bulges, steps a woman who has forgotten she is a lady." Gladys had strong views of what qualifies as ladylike behavior. Not only are the victims of 'invited' rape responsible for the attacks, but they are also responsible for the destruction of 'lady'hood. Gladys stated, 'Lady' is a common word tossed about in everyday usage, but the literal meaning has been destroyed by bad conduct. Its meaning has been neglected in her appearance, her manners, her way of speaking, the places she goes and people she goes with. Her code of propriety, if she had one, has been discarded....Women should not enter bars, even with a girl friend. A girl friend is no protection. If a woman is lonesome, there are other diversions. She can affiliate with an organization, a church, a social club. If she is a spiritually, educationally, physically and mentally well-adjusted woman, she will have no time to waste in a drinking place.

The implications of a woman's unladylike behavior were clear for Gladys: "[w]atch her, observe her actions and it will be immediately apparent whether or not there is a possibility she may some day be molested, raped, assaulted, even kidnapped."

The "under-age copulation" type of rape Gladys believed consisted primarily of girls who had willingly subjected themselves to intercourse, but who were in any event under eighteen.

While Gladys' view of rape probably matches the majority view of rape during her time and is still a view held by many people today, Gladys' views were not merely silent views held by a private woman. Gladys' career was based on her views and her success in gaining acquittals for rape defendants was based on convincing others of the validity of her view. Clearly, a woman defending a man...
on a rape charge on the grounds that the charges were false because the woman had asked for the rape to happen would have a tremendous impact on any jury. When you take into account also the number of sex crimes cases Gladys defended, the long span of her career, the respect she received from other members of the bar, and the dirth of women attorneys during her time, it seems inevitable that she had a tremendous impact on shaping the views countless juries, judges, and fellow attorneys had regarding rape. The mere fact alone that she won more sex crimes cases than any attorney in American history says that she managed to convince a great number of people to adopt her views on rape.

Just as she did with all her cases, Gladys went to extremes to win acquittals in her rape cases. She employed powerful images to convince borderline jurors of the impossibility of truly being raped under any circumstances other than those she described as "the brutal attack" type. For example, in defending a man against rape charges, Gladys said to a difficult juror, "Anytime after this trial is over, if you still believe a man can rape a woman while she's conscious, you're at liberty to step into my office and I'll prove that it can't be done." Gladys' client was acquitted. In another case, to drive this point home, she held a piece of paper with a hole in it in front of a juror and asked him to take a pen and try to stick the pen into the paper hole while Gladys moved the paper around. The juror found this task impossible. The result: another acquittal for one of Gladys' rape defendants and etched into the memory of the jurors the idea that if a woman tries to resist, she cannot be raped while conscious. Clearly, if the man succeeds in having intercourse with the woman, she acquiesced.

Success at the Expense of Children

Gladys defended those charged with a myriad of crimes against children, but especially those accused of sexual crimes against children. Just as with sexual crimes against women, Gladys took her role as defense counsel so seriously and worked on behalf of her clients so zealously that she literally took on her clients' views of the world. While Gladys acknowledged that "[a]n attack on a child can leave deep emotional scars that can change the course of his or her life" and that such a thing as a legitimate molester existed, for the most part she believed that the children accusing her clients of these deviant acts were generally lying. Gladys said of children, "A child possesses an imagination rivaling Alfred Hitchcock's, and often just as macabre." Again, one wonders how much effect the fact that Gladys was not only a woman but a mother herself had on the juries she encountered. After all, if a woman and mother could say these things about a child, then they had to be true--didn't they? Also, one wonders if the vehemence with which Gladys attacked child witnesses on the stand during cross-examination in defense of her clients would have been accepted by juries as legitimate and appropriate had she not been a woman and mother. It is doubtful that these same tactics would have been effective if they had been used by a male attorney.
One case in which Gladys believed in her client’s innocence and the deceitfulness of the accusing child, was a case involving the molestation of a 10-year-old girl. Gladys helped her client walk to and from the witness stand with a white cane denoting blindness. The judge dismissed the case on the grounds that no blind man could have done the things which the child claimed he had done. Clearly, the judge believed that the child was lying. The defendant then stood and facing the judge said to him, "Thank you. The moment I came into this courtroom and looked at you, I knew you had an honest face." Gladys whispered to her assistant that she really had no idea.

While Gladys showed little mercy to child witnesses, she was able to find mercy for even those she considered to be true molesters. She described the legitimate molester as "a disturbed man." She said of him that

\[h]e can be either married with a family, or single. In a way, he is to be pitied. He has strong guilt feelings and he lives in a private hell with himself. He utters the torments of the damned and carries a heavy burden of shame. Not all molesters are furtive and scheming and feel triumphant when not apprehended by the law. Some have a strong compulsion to be caught...they subconsciously want to pay for their deviate thoughts and actions.\]

To separate the liars from the true victims, Gladys urged that psychiatric examinations be given to all those who report that they have been victimized by a sex crime. Gladys explained her position stating that "I urge this because the victim often has deliberately invited the attack or may actually have been the aggressor. Contrary to what many people think, even children are capable of being the aggressor in a perverted relationship with an adult. And there is a shocking number of disturbed youngsters who will frame an adult." Gladys believed that the lies of a child were more powerful and destructive than all other lies. Gladys believed that a defendant's life could be destroyed by one child's lie because juries were extremely gullible in a child molestation charge. A child need not even tell a convincing lie; rather, it was enough to just tell one and they would be believed because the jury thinks "the poor, dear, sweet, little thing. How would he ever have known such a sordid experience unless it really happened?"

Gladys gave three reasons for why children lie about child molestation. First, Gladys believed that the children who lie about being molested do so as a form of revenge because they have a personal vendetta against the accused. Second, she believed that some children were merely such pathological liars that they did not even need a vendetta. She believed that children often got the details and ideas about the molestation from television and the movies. Overwhelmingly, however, Gladys blamed lying children on bad parenting: "Nine times out of ten you will find that so-called juvenile delinquents are what they are because they had to turn away from their parents for understanding. Life provides many channels leading from the original source. And, unless the better course is charted, youth's bark is liable to sail into some fetid backwater." Gladys
believed that children in her time lacked discipline. She stated, "As the adage
goes: 'The hand that rocks the cradle rules the world.' If true, then that same
hand should inflict punishment upon offspring when necessary." Gladys' major
contention was that "[d]elinquency is not fundamentally juvenile—it is adult."

The virtue of dependability develops through exercise. If children are taught, not
only by words but by example, that dependability is a thoroughly desirable habit
and one that pays dividends, it will become a compelling force for good. When
one is dependable, one considers others. One considers that which is beyond
oneself. And so robbery, theft, and all other overt acts that constitute delinquency
are automatically labelled 'Unworthy'.... To insure the future of your children, your
word must become your bond.

With Gladys' hard critique of parenting, it would be interesting to know how
Gladys herself rated as a parent. However, other than noting the fact that Gladys
had two children, nothing has been written about Gladys' relationship with them.
This seems especially odd not only because Gladys was such a high profile
woman, but also because of the mere fact that she was a woman; other than her
fashionable romps with her second husband, little is noted about Gladys'
personal life. Gladys' son Robert Towles Root was born in 1933 and he was the
product of Gladys' eleven year marriage to sheriff's deputy Frank Root. The
couple was married in 1930 and divorced in 1941. Gladys' second child was a
product of her second marriage to John C. "Jay" Geiger, a west coast
representative of a fashion magazine. The couple was married in 1943 and one
year later in 1944, they had a daughter named Christina.

Feminist and Anti-feminist views

Clearly, Gladys' views on sex crimes were far from feminist. However, there were
aspects of Gladys' beliefs which were strongly feminist. First of all, Gladys was a
strong advocate of legalized abortion prior to its legalization. Also, Gladys was
an advocate for legalized prostitution in a time when this was a rare position for a
woman to take. When asked what the difference between male and female
lawyers was, Gladys' response was contradictory. While her own career
suggests that she believed strongly in a woman's ability to compete with a man
equally, some comments made by Gladys suggest that she did not believe it was
appropriate for women to be lawyers--at least criminal attorneys:

There are few women criminal lawyers who have the physical endurance to cope
with the daily requirements--this constant treadmill with a brief case under each
arm. It's a grind year in and year out that takes its toll on a woman much faster
than on a man. There's a climax every hour on the hour and always a series of
daily crises. Women marry, bear children, are absorbed by domestic life and
social demands. It becomes increasingly difficult for them to concentrate solely
on their profession. Should they not marry, and so grow into old maids, there is a
danger of a warped, bitter outlook which might pervade their thinking. Not so with
most men. They can become mono-minded, shutting outside influences from their lives.21

Perhaps, Gladys is merely commenting here on the reality that even women with careers still have to bear primary responsibility for domestic life--and, as a result, career women in fact end up with two full time occupations while men merely have one. Or, simply Gladys may not have believed that all women could be attorneys--but that only a rare few such as herself were cut out for this occupation. The women who did have the stamina to become attorneys, however, she believed were equally as capable as men:

The chief critics of women lawyers are of the old school...old-timers. You can almost read their thoughts of: 'What the hell is the legal profession coming to?' If one of these gentlemen of archaic ideas entered the arena of the courtroom to tangle with a lady lawyer, he'd soon discover that the distaff side is rightfully entitled to its diplomas. Many a male lawyer, when defeated by a woman, will blame it on that mystical factor they call female intuition. This is his excuse. In plain language he has faced too much perception and intelligence, and logical thinking processes. Yes, I believe that on any single case, if well rested beforehand, a woman lawyer can hold her own with a man.22

GLADYS THE CRIMINAL?

During two periods in her life, Gladys was on the other side of the legal battlefield--she was the accused rather than the defender. The first was when the 'lady in purple' was indicted on charges of conspiracy, suborning perjury, and obstruction of justice. The second was when she was accused of tax evasion.

The Indictment of Gladys Towles Root

In July of 1964 an indictment was issued against Gladys by the Federal Grand Jury in connection with her actions during her defense of one of the defendants in the kidnapping case of Frank Sinatra, Jr. Three men had kidnapped Frank Sinatra Jr. from across the California-Nevada state line at Lake Tahoe and transported him to Los Angeles. Frank Sinatra Jr. was taken at gun point from his room on a night when he was scheduled to appear at the nightclub Harrah's. The kidnappers collected $240,000 for the nineteen year old from his famous father Frank Sinatra Sr.--most of this money was ultimately recovered, however.

Gladys was hired to defend one of the kidnappers, John William Irwin, age forty-two, of whom Gladys said, "This man is not a criminal type. His mind is broad and open, and he does not think connivingly. He is inconceivably naive. He believes the Sinatras and his co-defendants are going to do right by him."23 Mr. Irwin's version of the events which took place paint him as heroic and overprotective--but admittedly in a foolish manner. Mr. Irwin claimed to have only participated in the kidnapping in order to prevent any injury from happening to the
young Sinatra. Mr. Irwin had had a romantic interest in the mother of one of the other kidnappers, Barry Keenan. Apparently, he had fatherly feelings for his co-defendant as a result. Mr. Irwin stated that "I took an oath unto myself that whenever I saw a boy going any or partly astray I would lean over backwards to help him." This is apparently what Mr. Irwin was doing on the night of the kidnapping--making sure that Keenan did not compound his troubles by causing injury to young Sinatra.

Gladys defended her client with her usual zeal--perhaps this time a bit too much zeal. Charges were brought against Gladys based on her allegedly fabricating a story that the young singer concocted the kidnapping for publicity reasons. Gladys was indicted in 1964 on charges of conspiracy, suborning perjury, and obstruction of justice. It was not until four years later that the charges against her were dropped.

**Tax Evasion Charges**

"The Taxman Is After L.A.'s Lady in Purple" read the June 9, 1980 headline in The National Law Journal reporting the filing of a complaint by the IRS in federal district court in Los Angeles to foreclose on tax liens totaling more than $230,000, including interest and penalties. The government sought to seize properties of Mrs. Root in San Bernardino and Madera counties based on a judgment won by the government in Tax Court in 1969. In Gladys' usual style, she fought the judgment with endless vigor. After losing her appeal to the federal appeals court in 1977, Gladys tried to appeal all the way to the United States Supreme Court. The U.S. Supreme Court, however, refused to hear the matter. THE PERSONAL TRIALS OF GLADYS TOWLES ROOT

Like most people, Gladys Towles Root experienced many anguishing and difficult moments in her life. The worst of these appears to have been the illness and death of her second husband, Jay Geiger. Jay was by all accounts Gladys' soul mate. When the couple met, Jay was the west coast representative for a fashion magazine--a job which suited him well. Jay's fashion sense was as eccentric as Gladys'. For example, one evening dining at Perino's restaurant in Los Angeles, Gladys wore a "purple velvet dress with twenty yards of skirt and scalloped hemline and sixty yards of tulle petticoat underneath. She carried a matching velvet purse two feet square. Her earrings were shaped to resemble bunches of lilacs. Two additional clusters of lilacs adorned one of her oversized hats. Her jacket was dyed purple and her shoes matched. Her hair was strawberry blonde." Jay, was adorned equally flamboyantly. He wore a vicuna suit and the "jacket lapels were mink, as were all buttons on the jacket and trousers. His cufflinks were also mink." The two were not only a pair in the fashion sense, but they were also completely devoted to one another. Gladys once surprised her husband on one of his birthdays with a white monkey named Charley. Gladys dressed Charley in a sports jacket, top hat and striped trousers for her husband's amusement. Jay was equally devoted to Gladys. He worked as her office
manager for many years and generally did all he could to make his wife’s life more joyful and memorable. Gladys had once told her husband that if reincarnation was true, then she’d like an earthly return wearing a white dress and riding upon the back of a winged elephant. On the morning of one of Gladys' subsequent birthdays, outside of their house stood an elephant with cardboard wings. One evening out at a trendy restaurant, Pablo, the Brazilian parrot which always sat perched on Jay's left shoulder, bit a judge which had ruled against Gladys on a morals case the day before. Although purely accidental, clearly the couple, and even their animals, were so in tune with each other that even unplanned they came to each other's defense.

At four a.m. one morning Gladys was awakened by the moans of her husband. This was to be the first of a very long series of incidents. Upon operating on Jay, the doctors had found a pancreatic cyst. The first cyst was removed only to find a subsequent cyst had formed later. Consequently, another operation followed. Pneumonia set in. The pancreatic condition was still a problem even after the two surgeries and it was now spreading to Jay's liver. Jay developed jaundice, his gall bladder went bad, and he was believed to be becoming diabetic. After nearly three years of sickness and suffering for which Jay had been receiving morphine at two hour intervals, he was addicted. A long period of drug withdrawal ensued. Jay's illness had also taken a toll on his mental outlook; Jay attempted numerous suicide attempts--most of which were failures only due to the intervention of Gladys herself. After Jay's drug addiction was beaten, his health took a turn for the worse. At first, a part of his stomach was removed. Jay was having so many surgeries performed that Gladys had a bedroom turned into an operating room because her husband did not want to go to any more hospitals. Jay improved for a period of almost two years during which he went back to work as Gladys' office manager and then ultimately took up gourmet cooking. Then, however, Jay began to decline again and it was determined that the remainder of his stomach needed to be removed. His stomach was removed completely. Ultimately, Jay began hemorrhaging. In the ambulance on the way to the hospital, Jay told Gladys that he was going to die in four days. Gladys sat by Jay's bedside throughout the entire fourth day. He died at exactly midnight on the fourth day. On October 16, 1958, Jay Geiger was interred in a crypt in Forest Lawn Cemetery.

The death of her husband was not the only hardship which the "lady in purple" had to endure. While little has been written about the later years of Gladys Towles Root, what has been written suggests that these years were filled with many anguishing moments. By the end of the 1970s Gladys was reportedly suffering financial hardships. She sold her Hancock Park mansion and was reportedly living in "far less resplendent quarters." In addition, a fire had apparently destroyed the lavish offices from which Gladys had operated during the height of her career. Now, Gladys was "operating out of a seedy--but still gold and purple--office in a crumbling building on Hill Street." Gladys, however, was a fighter until the end. Despite her misfortune and apparently failing health, she
still worked 16 hour days and upon the anniversary of her fifty years in practice she had plans to add new angles to her career. In addition to maintaining her criminal law practice in part, she was planning on traveling to represent her corporate clients. Additionally, she planned to continue to fight for the reform of laws governing the treatment of prison inmates and those defining the rights of 'middle-aged and older people.' Gladys also had grand plans to reconstruct her burned out office building—which she was going to have rebuilt to include not just her office but a disco as well.

On Tuesday, December 21, 1982 Gladys Towles Root died in a Pomona courtroom of a heart attack at age 77. She died in the only manner which seemed fitting for such a staunch advocate of the rights of criminals--during the trial of a sex crimes case. Gladys was in the processes of defending two brothers accused in a sodomy-rape case. While appearing before Judge Peter Smith, Gladys said "give me a few moments...I'm having trouble breathing" and then proceeded to collapse on a courtroom bench. She was pronounced dead two hours later at Pomona Valley Community Hospital. Gladys died, not only doing to work which she loved, but she died in all the splendor in which she lived. On the day of her death, Gladys was attired completely in gold.

Gladys Towles Root was as colorful a character as the clothing she wore. To say the least, the woman was complex. Her gutsy, flamboyant style is awe-inspiring. Her sincere dedication to those she served is heartwarming. Unfortunately, Gladys, the human-being, cannot be a true hero for all of woman-kind. Trapped in the thinking of her day and biased by the clients she so loved to represent, Gladys was, and always will be, to some a woman who turned on other women. Rather than helping other women pull themselves up the way she herself had done, Gladys helped to victimize them. Gladys, the attorney, should be admired for building a brilliant legal career at a time when it was difficult for women to gain recognition as equals--one wonders, however, what price was paid by others for her success.

LEADS TO FOLLOW

Most of the following leads to follow should be in the Los Angeles area--since this is where Gladys spent all of her life:

1) While Gladys built her law practice up to that point that it was eventually housed in a fourteen room office, it is unclear, despite the size of her practice, whether Gladys ever had any partners. Gladys, I believe, based on her personality, practiced alone. It is, however, noted that she had assistants, secretaries, etc. To get a fuller picture of Gladys, the attorney, it would be interesting to interview these people. The only name ever mentioned was Gladys first secretary, Winnie Dickey. Perhaps an add in the local newspapers, or questioning of older bar association members would produce more names and people.
2) Since Gladys spent her entire legal career in the Los Angeles area, interviewing attorneys who worked with Gladys and judges she appeared before would add an interesting angle—and probably present a fuller picture of the level of respect Gladys received from her colleagues since what is written is not always accurate. Again, obtaining a local bar association roster and contacting the older attorneys—especially criminal law attorneys—might turn up some interesting results.

3) Nothing has been written about Gladys' children: Christina Geiger, or Robert Towles Root. One comment mentioned that Robert Towles Root had gone to Medical School at University of Chicago Medical School prior to Jay Geiger's death in 1958—perhaps he can be traced through there. It is also noted that Gladys had grandchildren—although no mention of names or how many.

4) Cy Rice wrote a biography about Gladys in the 1960s which has now gone out of print—perhaps he or she can still be located through the publisher. Extensive interviews were done of Gladys and perhaps these documents or recordings have been preserved. If Cy Rice cannot be reached or does not have old court records and trial transcripts, etc. then these can be obtained through the local courts.

5) Nothing is known about Gladys during law school. She attended USC law school. Perhaps old records are still available.

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"2 Sinatra Case Lawyers Deny Conspiracy Charges", New York Times, 12/11/64

"Attorneys Deny Perjury", New York Times, 9/1/64


"Lawyers Arraigned in Sinatra Case", New York Times, 12/31/64

"Gladys Root", Los Angeles Times, 2/6/81

"Her Days in Court", The Los Angeles Daily Journal, 12/31/82

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GLADYS TOWLES ROOT TIMELINE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1905</td>
<td>Gladys Towles born on same day as California became a state.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Family &amp; Background:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>--grew up on a wheat ranch--which is now covered by downtown LA. She grew up in upper-class household.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>--Mother: Clara Dexter Towles, worked as secretary to the speaker of the house of the Kansas state legislature before the family moved to California.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>--Father: Charles Towles: wanted to become a lawyer, but financial pressures interrupted his education and he ended up working for Singer Sewing Machine company instead.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1930</td>
<td>*Gladys marries Frank Root, a sheriff's deputy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>*Gladys graduates from USC law school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>*Gladys opens her own law office in LA's financial district--just blocks away from skid row.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Some notable accomplishments during her years of practice:</td>
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</table>
--her first case was a murder case.

--within a month, fifteen defendants had signed on.

--at one point her office was handling 1,600 cases a year, more criminal cases than any other private American firm.

--throughout her 52 year career, she averaged 75 courtroom appearances per month (including through both her pregnancies).

--she won more sex crimes cases than any lawyer in American history.

--she got a law prohibiting interracial marriage between a filipino and a caucasian person declared unconstitutional.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1933</td>
<td>Son Robert Towles Root was born.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1941</td>
<td>Gladys and Frank Root divorce after 11 year marriage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1943</td>
<td>Gladys marries John &quot;Jay&quot; C. Geiger--a west coast representative of a fashion magazine.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1944</td>
<td>Daughter Christina Geiger born.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1958</td>
<td>Jay Geiger dies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1982</td>
<td>Gladys dies in Pomona, California courtroom</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Endnotes

1 "Gladys Towles Root Dies; Colorful Lawyer was 77" by Eric Malnic and Karen Wada, Los Angeles Times 12/22/82

2 id.

3 Rice, Cy, Get Me Gladys! at p. 40

4 The Fifty Most Influential Women in American Law, p. 161-2

5 Get Me Gladys! at 13

6 id. at 116

7 id. at 117

8 id.
"Lady in Purple' Took L.A. Legal World by Storm" by Cecilia Rasmussen, Los Angeles Times 2/6/95

12. Get Me Gladys! at 145

13. id. at 130

14. L.A. Times 2/6/95

15. Get Me Gladys! at 145

16. id. at 137

17. id. at 130

18. id. at 132

19. id. at 146

20. id. at 147

21. id. at 205-206

22. id.

23. id. at 213

24. id. at 214

25. Rice, Cy, Defender of the Damned, p. 169

26. id.

27. L.A. Times 12/22/82

28. id.

29. id.