

# It Runs in the Family

“Let’s face it—I have a certain snappy personality that doesn’t get too worked up when confronted with an argument. This is the perfect way for someone like me to make my living,” explains Theresa Mounce Kohlhoff, a 1965 graduate of the Academy of the Holy Child in Portland, Ore., who has practiced law for more than 25 years.

In 1980, Theresa earned her law degree from the Northwestern School of Law of Lewis & Clark College. Throughout her career, she has worked in almost every area of the law, including domestic relations, real estate, lien foreclosure, and probate, but her most recent endeavor—opening a law practice with her daughter, Elizabeth E. Welch—is certainly a new and very different challenge.

The practice, named appropriately, Kohlhoff & Welch, provides a strong, energetic voice for people in conflict, especially women, children, and the elderly. At the core of this mother-daughter partnership is the belief that if the individual receives social justice and prospers, the whole community is bettered.

“The idea that someone might help the powerless is not typically part of the equation in today’s world. But Elizabeth and I have an immediate empathy to help those most in need. We may be the only voice for a group which is routinely victimized,” says Theresa.

Opening this law practice has been a long-held dream for Theresa. “This was one of those things that I thought should be the second I watched my daughter, at just six-years-old, sit down with paper, pen, and cash box, and pretend she was working in a law office.”

## Holy Child Memories

Long before Theresa became a lawyer, she attended the Academy of the Holy Child and found strong role models that influenced the person she has become. She remembers her time at the school as one in which she and her classmates existed outside the patriarchy. “I don’t think this was the message that the Holy Child Sisters set out to teach us, but their actions spoke louder than their words. When I saw Susan Sarandon as Sr. Helen Prejean in the 1996 film, *Dead Man Walking*, I immediately recognized her as being like the Holy Child Sisters who had taught me.”

But it was not all flowers and roses for Theresa at the Academy of the Holy Child! She recalls a time when, as a member of the debate team, Mother Redempta (Mother Redempta is Eleanor Rice, SHCJ) “kicked” her out of a debate for being late in getting to the car. “I really was waiting at the wrong spot and felt wrongly accused, although this was one of the rare times when I was innocent, so I suppose it was retributive justice!” Ironically, it was Mother Redempta’s civics class, full of history on Robert Kennedy and Rosa Parks, that most inspired Theresa: “I became an idealist for the rest of my life.”

As for the future of her career and law practice, Theresa says, “Truthfully, I want to be playing at the top of my game, but located here—at the service of this community. I also love seeing my little red-headed granddaughter, Elizabeth’s daughter, run down the hall at our office to plant a big hug and kiss on me! I have every intention of ushering in another generation to the partnership when the time comes.” And it seems certain that that time will come—Theresa, who is married to a lawyer, has four grown daughters, two stepsons, and three granddaughters.



(l to r) Elizabeth E. Welch with her mother, Theresa Mounce Kohlhoff, an alum of the Academy of the Holy Child in Portland, OR.