

Peninsula Law

Trusted counsel for life and legacy.

Beti Bergman, a principal and the founder of the firm Peninsula Law, seems to have been born to be an attorney. She couples a keen analytical mind with a love of courtroom combat to practice her triple-threat in the field of probate: planning, administering and litigating estate issues for her clients.

Asked about her life as an attorney, Bergman agrees, "I would say it's a natural fit. It's not incongruent to who I am. I have an analytical mind, I love to figure things out. And, I definitely love going to court.

"To be a trial attorney, of course you've got to be competitive, and you have to have confidence in yourself. And I like being on stage. I don't shy away from the limelight. If I could go to court every day, I would do it. I do love to argue."

Although Bergman loves the courtroom, she said many of those fights could be avoided through more careful estate planning. People sometimes put together estate plans on their own, with the help of a paralegal rather than an attorney, or through a trust mill. This can result in a poorly crafted legal document that is not valid. Contention amongst heirs then ensues as to how the estate should be distributed.

"For a relatively small investment, you can have an attorney prepare a proper estate plan. Or, your heirs can pay an attorney tens of thousands of dollars to fight for the proper distribution of your estate later," she said.

As a lawyer in a boutique law firm, Bergman is able to give detailed, personal attention to her clients. Bergman built Peninsula Law from the ground up with the goal of providing good legal services to people without the stuffiness of a big law firm. Knowing that people tend to be afraid of talking to attorneys, Bergman always interacts with her clients as if she were helping her own family members or friends. This is the type of relationship that she has cultivated with her clients. She understands their problems from their perspective.

Bergman enjoys a broad perspective in her practice, seeing probate issues from all sides.

"Some attorneys in this field work only on the planning side, or only on the litigation side," she said. "I do all three phases – planning, administration and litigation – so I see the issues from each perspective. To be a good litigator in this field, you have to know why a plan was put together the way it was, and to be a good planner you have to know how it can come apart at the end."

On the litigation side, Bergman sees the abuse of seniors who can no longer handle their affairs, and she sees abuses by those who administer the assets of the deceased.

"When someone is old, they can be taken advantage of by



Beti Bergman Photo by Brad Jacobson

an adult child or perhaps a neighbor, who will take them to an attorney and get them to leave everything to them. It is not uncommon that elderly citizens are taken advantage of, unfortunately," Bergman said.

She also sees battles between beneficiaries.

"In estate matters, there always seems to be an underlying, deep-rooted family discord that manifests itself in the fight over the estate," Bergman said. "It's hard to see families fighting like this."

Bergman tries to bring the family together to reach an equitable agreement before battling in court.

She said it is always better to see families reach a peaceful resolution rather than fighting each other. But if court proceedings are necessary, Bergman is always a fierce advocate for her client.

Aside from her law practice, Bergman is a firm believer in giving back to the community. Bergman's community involvement is extensive. She currently serves on the Los Angeles Superior Court Probate Volunteer Panel, and has served on the court's Guardianship Volunteer Panel, and as a volunteer mediator for Superior Court in Torrance.

Bergman also is a founding member of the Asian Pacific American Women Lawyers Alliance, for which she still actively serves on the board, and is past president of the Southern California Chinese Lawyers Association, where she has served on its board of governors for eight years, and led its virtual reality trial skills workshop for four years.

Bergman earned her J.D. from UC Davis School of Law, an M.S. in Applied Mathematics from Cal State Long Beach, and a B.S. in Applied Mathematics from UCLA.