

**DON'T MESS WITH GLORIA
RUTHLESS, POWERFUL, RICH
— THE FEMINIST LAWYER EVERY
HOLLYWOOD STAR SHOULD FEAR**

She's already done battle against Tiger Woods and O.J. Simpson. Now she's set her sights on Mel Gibson and Roman Polanski. Tim Teeman meets Gloria Allred, the most notorious lawyer in LA

PORTRAIT Patrick Fraser



For someone on the seventeenth day of a fast, Gloria Allred is looking pretty chipper. The media have been besieging her office, and the 69-year-old lawyer is dressed in a purple trouser suit, her hair a blonde, highlighted feathery crop, her face unlined if heavily made-up. "I've lost weight and I am hungry, but I am hungrier for the rights of women," Allred says. The fast is to publicise Allred's desire for the insertion of the Equal Rights Amendment, guaranteeing protection from gender discrimination, in the United States Constitution.

"It's a 30-day fast: you [normally] have three meals a day, and it's been 90 years since women won the right to vote in the US," she says, explaining the arithmetic of her mission. She is taking liquids and supplements. "People say women were 'given' the right to vote, but women have never been given anything," she says. "They've had to fight for everything. They had to starve themselves for the right to vote. They had to nearly die."

That timeless feminist adage, "the personal is political", is key to Allred's character. She has survived a rape, an illegal abortion, and emotional abuse by a former husband whom she fought to secure adequate child support when she became a single parent. Indeed, fighting is what she does best – on her desk is a plaque, "Be Reasonable. Do It My Way" – and if it's before lights and cameras, so much the better. Allred is famous in America as the much-feared lawyer for wronged women. Her name has even been invoked on *The Simpsons*.

Allred typically stands behind her clients like a lioness as they face the flashbulbs and microphones, bathing in their refracted limelight. She made headlines most recently by representing the former erotic movie actress Jodie Fisher, who accused Hewlett-Packard CEO Mark Hurd of sexual harassment (Hurd resigned and settled with Fisher out of court). Allred has just been retained by Mel Gibson's alleged mistress, Violet Kowal. "He made shockingly racist, sexist, misogynistic statements," Allred says of the tapes of Gibson's supposed telephone calls to his former girlfriend, Oksana Grigorieva. "If that was his voice, he should be sentenced to time in custody, absolutely. I think the district attorney has enough evidence to prosecute him. He should be held accountable and suffer the consequences."

Allred may claim a passionately held feminist motivation behind all she does, but she also loves the spotlight. She secured a reported multi-million-dollar payout for Rachel Uchitel, the nightclub hostess who allegedly had an affair with Tiger Woods, and is also representing Joslyn James, the

porn star who says Woods asked her to give up porn for him. A new client, the actress Charlotte Lewis, claims the film director Roman Polanski sexually abused her as a young woman. Allred has represented the family of Nicole Brown Simpson, the murdered wife of O.J. Simpson. She represented Kelly Fisher, the model who claimed to have been engaged to Dodi Fayed. When Michael Jackson was alive, she lobbied hard for him to be prosecuted for child molestation and still thinks he is guilty – "which isn't to take away from his great talent" – although Jackson's response to Allred's view at the time was to tell her to "go to hell".

"There are many other cases, involving well-known names, that you will never know about, that I settle privately," Allred says, and she makes much of those she has fought "not involving famous people". In 2008, for example, her firm won a \$1.68 million settlement for a group of female farm workers. In her office she has a British policeman's outfit from the early 1900s to remind her of the opposition the Suffragettes faced, and a British monarch's crest with its motto: "Dieu et mon droit". Is she always right? "No," she says bluntly. "The right answer lies somewhere between God and one's conscience."

Her office, overlooking downtown LA, with the Hollywood sign a speck in the distance, is also packed with award plaques (or as Allred dismisses them, "tchotchkes", Yiddish for "baubles") for services to women's and gay rights; in 2004 she was the first lawyer in California to fight for the right of a gay couple to marry. All of the wooden furniture has women's faces carved into it. "Because women have been invisible in law offices for years. There needs to be more female partners in



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law firms." On the floor are the most recent articles written about her, already mounted.

The walls of the main office are littered with certificates from her past, and there is a bathroom, containing a suitcase with lots of make-up bags, with a sign designating it for "the exclusive use of Gloria Allred". She claims this very visible self-promotion is for her clients' benefit. Her colleagues deny she is a diva; one says that she'll always listen to other people's views, and after dramatic press conferences come back to the office and laugh about it. "I've only managed to change her

mind about something once," he says. After consulting Allred he decides he can't tell me what this momentous occasion involved.

At her three-storey beach-front Malibu home the next day, Allred is in another trouser suit by her favourite designer, St. John (this time it's hot pink). She tells me she never goes on holiday. "I have a lot of work to do," she says, "so this is my sea." The lapping and crashing of the waves can be heard from every sparsely furnished room of this bolthole (she has another home in LA during the week). There are photos of Lisa Bloom, her daughter,

Glockwise, from top left: Gloria Allred with Joslyn James, alleged mistress of Tiger Woods; with Rachel Uchitel, another alleged mistress of Woods; with Charlotte Lewis, who claims to

have been abused by Roman Polanski; outside the Supreme Court of California with Robin Tyler and Diane Olson, the gay couple whom she represented in their fight to marry

and Bloom's teenage children, Sarah and Sam. Allred hopes that one day they might become partners in her legal practice. When they were young Allred would set them debates and get each of them to argue for the side to which they were least sympathetic. "They'd ask, 'What's the right answer?' and I'd say: 'There is no right answer, just a better argument.'"

The house is beautiful but empty-feeling. There is no time for close friendships in Allred's life ("Friendship requires time and commitment, which I don't have"). Does she ever feel lonely? "Why should I? I already

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have company: me." Does she ever feel down? "No. I'm very optimistic: I embrace any setback as an opportunity to win change."

There is a sense that everything that has happened to Allred in her life has brought her to this point. There is a photograph of an adult Allred pictured outside a terraced home: the one in Philadelphia that she grew up in, the only child to Morris, a salesman, and Stella, a housewife. They told her that they had met on a street corner next to where a tram car called Desire ran. Later, she heard another story. Her mother came to the US pursuing a man she had met in Manchester, where she grew up. Another family rumour is that she may have been pregnant (not with Gloria, who shrugs at the possibility that she may have a half-brother or sister).

Allred is uncharacteristically floored when I ask her if her parents' marriage was a loving one. "I don't know, but they were together all their lives," she says. They adored her. Morris worked constantly to provide the money they intended to pay for her education. On Sundays he would take her to feed the squirrels, then to the library (where she would devour Dickens and Louisa May Alcott), then the cinema, then tea. "But I most remember him at his desk, working." Her mother was not satisfied as a housewife, Allred says, but she taught her to challenge the status quo. Allred says she inherited her father's work ethic, and learnt "the notion of duty" from them both.

At her all-girls high school in Philadelphia, Allred was told she could be anything she wanted, but she was insecure around the daughters of doctors, lawyers and bankers. She was already a rebel: her French teacher called her Jeanne d'Arc, "even though that may have been down to my short haircut, like Jean Seberg's", the actress who portrayed the icon in the movie, *Saint Joan*. Allred had boyfriends, though nothing serious, then, while studying English at the University of Pennsylvania, she met the handsome, blue-blooded Peyton Bray, whom she lost her virginity to and married. "He was extraordinarily bright and handsome," says Allred. "But he had anger management issues, to put it mildly. Everyone wanted to be around him; he was the life and soul of the party. Later on, he was hospitalised on a National Guard mental health ward. I think he was bipolar. I was scared of him."

When Allred doesn't want to discuss something – her love of publicity, her ruthless modus operandi, her private life – she turns the question into one she wants to answer,

like any good lawyer. Why was she scared of Bray, I ask. She characterises their marriage in the span of a student's life: "Met him as a freshman, married him as a sophomore, had a daughter [Lisa] when we were juniors, divorced him as a senior." She talks about how "painful" it was, how she thought she could change him, and says she went into "years of denial" about what happened. Which was what? More evasion, then: "A friend told me that I had told her he threw a pan of food into the ceiling in anger. He threw things. I didn't want to bring my daughter up in that atmosphere. It was frightening."

While ironing, Allred would watch *I Love Lucy*, and recognised in Lucille Ball's character another woman who didn't fit society's expectations. (Later, she bumped into Ball in the Beverly Hills Hotel, where the actress said: "Gloria Allred! Oh, my God, I'm such a huge fan of yours. I've been watching you for years – I love what you do. You keep fighting for women and you keep fighting even harder. It's great.") Did Bray hit Allred? "I don't think he did. He was emotionally abusive. But I have suppressed a lot of the memories." She left him and pursued him for child support, though she never restricted his access to Lisa, whose surname is Allred's maiden name. Bray committed suicide "around 20 years ago".

Allred moved in with her parents, studied for a masters degree and worked to support herself. She became a teacher at an almost all-black school in Philadelphia, and later taught in LA. In 1966, she went to Acapulco with a girlfriend, and one evening went on a date with a local physician. He took her to a hospital to check on some patients, which she took to mean he was responsible. He said he had other patients at a motel. They went to a room, where he locked the door, pulled out a gun and raped her. "It was completely shocking," Allred says. "The rest of it goes dark at that point." She can't recall specific details. "I have it suppressed so deep inside. All I remember was going back to my friend afterwards, saying we had to go home. I knew no one would believe me. It was such a deeply traumatic, horrible experience."

She discovered that she was pregnant as a result of the rape, and decided to have an abortion, illegal at the time. Did she think about keeping the baby? "I knew I wasn't going to be able to take care of two children, economically or physically." That it was caused by rape wasn't a factor, she says. Her abortion doctor did a botched job; she lost a

life-endangering amount of blood and suffered a serious infection. "I've no regrets," she says. "I made the right decision. I was not going to assume responsibility for a child I could not love and care for. That's why I understand why women make the choices they make."

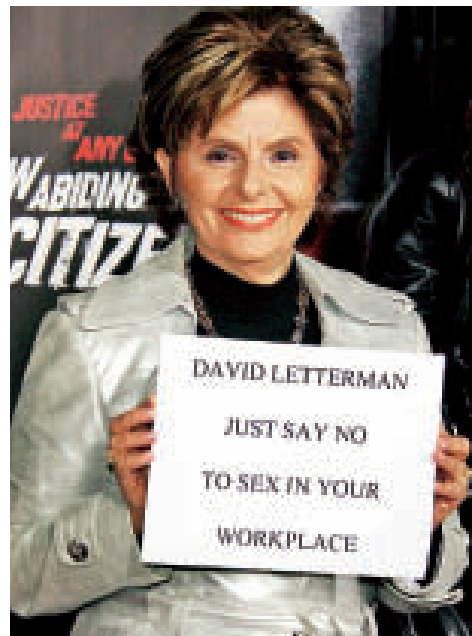
Her second marriage, to businessman William Allred in 1968, lasted 19 years, although her face turns to stone talking about it. "It was time for it to end, so I left," she says. "I probably should have left even earlier." She says it wasn't because he abused her or the relationship ran out of steam, but won't say if he cheated on her or not. They are not friends now, "and we're not enemies; we have no contact". It didn't disillusion her about relationships. "I know that through my own, and friends' experiences, marriages are not all wine and roses. It just makes me a more committed feminist and more committed to women's rights. I never think: 'Woe is me.' My question is: 'What can I learn from this?'"

There have been two relationships since; the second was in its early stages when the man died suddenly from brain cancer. "I don't date, want to date, have time to date, or want to commit to dating," says Allred. "I'm not willing to invest my time with a man when so many women need my help."

She thought the emotional abuse, rape, abortion trauma, bad marriages and child support issues were unique to her, and was shocked to find that so many other women had gone through them, "and so much more". Did she ever have therapy? "I never want to be counselled out of this rage," she says. "Or have it muffled by tranquillisers." When she saw how widespread these issues were, "I wanted to find ways to end these injustices. Women say they love me because I am fearless, and that is because so many women live in fear, socialised into being passive."

After law school in 1976, Allred and two fellow students, Michael Maroko and Nathan Goldberg, set up the legal practice they have today. In her 2006 book, *Fight Back and Win*, the autobiographical part is peripheral to the litany of influential cases Allred has fought, including a girl's fight to join the Scouts and another woman's struggle to bring the priests who sexually abused her to justice. It's a spicy, slightly surreal book – including a cheerleader who was told her breasts were too big – but it made Allred's name. Hillary Clinton told her she was a "true feminist pioneer".

A lot of people see her as scary, I say. "I hope so," Allred shoots back. When one



Protesting against the David Letterman scandal at the LA premiere of the film *Law Abiding Citizen* last October

man asked her, intending an insult, "Are you a lesbian?" she responded: "Are you the alternative?" In a series of testy exchanges, Allred first claims not to know about the media circus she is associated with, that she is focused on "coverage" for her clients rather than "publicity, which is a Hollywood term". She charges \$650 an hour, arguably more than Jodie Fisher, whom Allred characterised as a "struggling single mother", can afford. "Every single woman comes to me," Allred says. "Some we take on contingency, which means we receive a percentage of the ultimate settlement, some we take on pro bono [for free]. I look at every case and consider if it has legal merit and, if so, I'll take it on."

Are hostesses like Uchitel and Fisher really feminist causes to co-opt? From the outside, it seems some of these women got sexually involved with rich men and now they're after cash. "I'm there as an advocate for women," Allred says, refusing to discuss Fisher's case. "I don't think about who's popular, whether they're rich, poor or middle class. I represent women who I believe have been victims

of some injustice, or abuse of power, or betrayal of trust." Surely she is just setting out to shame these men. "That is not my motivation," Allred says. "I do whatever is in the best interests of my client." Allred clearly relishes the attention. "I do like creating a climate of opinion that is supportive of my client's case," she says carefully. "On so many issues women don't have a voice; they have had to suffer in silence for many years."

But her tactics vary. Why did she partially hang Mark Hurd out to dry, yet so publicly shame Imran Khan years ago, by revealing his paternity of Sita White's child when he was fighting in a key Pakistani election? It was surely calculated to destroy his chances? "My duty is not to Imran Khan," Allred says, angrily. "It was to my client. There is never a bad time or a good time to establish the paternity of a child. I'm not going to accept the guilt for another person's wrongdoing. By going public we wanted him to understand that we were not going to allow him to escape or avoid his responsibility." You could have legally confronted him in private, I reply. "There are hundreds of millions of fathers who do not accept responsibility for their children," she says. "Why not speak out?" Yes, she plays rough she admits, "but we never cross, or even go near, ethical boundaries".

Allred – relentless, indefatigable, a workaholic – will turn 70 next year. Many people think she has had plastic surgery, she says, but she hasn't, "Which isn't to criticise those who have. At Hollywood parties, I'm the only one with a crooked nose." The plan is to continue practising law; the idea of becoming a judge is anathema to her. "I don't want to be impartial. I want to fight for what I believe."

She hopes her cases have a "ripple effect" to other women, but knows younger or other powerful women do not necessarily identify themselves as feminists. "But my job isn't to criticise them. You often find that something happens to a woman, and then she discovers she is a feminist. Younger women are socialised into thinking the prince will come, not realising he may not, or he may turn out to be a frog."

Should men be scared of Allred? She smiles. Her uncle Simon once said that men who have treated the women in their lives well are not scared because they have nothing to be ashamed of. The ones who have erred are nervous and should be nervous, says Allred, "because if those women come to me, and I believe in them, I will come after those men". She tells a story of a recent Hollywood party she attended, where she gave her card to the wife of a famous actor. "Don't give it to her," the actor pleaded. "I can see she's happy," Allred told him. "But this ensures you're going to be nicer to her than you ever have been because now she knows where to find me." ■

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