

# MARGARET BATTERSBY BLACK

## Leader-Advocate for Injured and Female Plaintiff's Lawyers

by Mika Doyle

Margaret P. Battersby Black's legal philosophy is simple: to ensure her clients' wrongs are righted.

"I want to make sure they have a voice," says Battersby Black, "and that those who take advantage of others are held accountable." That philosophy has made Battersby Black one of the most impactful personal injury and medical malpractice attorneys in Chicago.

At only 38, Battersby Black of Levin & Perconti has already proven herself a person to watch in the industry.

"I think she'll be a superstar," says Mary Periolat, who has been practicing medical malpractice and product liability defense since 1983. "I'm very impressed with her legal skills, and I think she's very well respected by the judges because she's very prepared and always professional. She truly has the best interest of her clients at heart and works hard to get them a good result for their sake."

Battersby Black and Periolat worked two medical malpractice cases together. One of the cases, which took place in 2017, made an impression on Periolat because Battersby Black wasn't originally working the case. She was called in later when it was apparent the case was going to trial.

"Margaret was asked to come in and be co-counsel and try the case with another partner from Levin & Perconti," says Periolat, "and she picked that case up and learned it like she had been with it from the beginning. I was very impressed with that."

That case left an impression on Battersby Black as well. "We got a verdict that set a record for nursing home cases in Illinois," says Battersby Black. "It involved a very competent, 85-year-old woman who was living independently, and she had a stroke due to nursing home negligence. She died during the case, so to be able to get the verdict for the family in her honor that set a record was awesome. The family was very appreciative and felt they'd really done right by their mom."



### FIGHTING FOR THE UNDERDOG

Battersby Black grew up in the Detroit suburb of Beverly Hills. Although she was surrounded by family members who were judges and lawyers, it was her father, Michael Battersby, who truly inspired her to enter the legal profession. He was a personal injury and medical malpractice attorney who, as Battersby Black puts it, was always fighting for the underdogs. Battersby Black says the gratitude of her father's clients really left an impression on her as a child.

She recalls one of her father's clients in particular. The young man in his early 20s had been hit by a bus and had suffered a head injury. The injury, says Battersby Black, affected his ability to work and live independently, but her father was able to help the young man with his recovery by getting a good verdict for him. That client sent her father Christmas cards every year and continued to stay in touch because he was so grateful for her father's help.

Those kinds of experiences initially introduced Battersby Black to the idea that

a lawyer's job is to do far more than just try cases; the profession was an avenue to make a difference in people's lives.

Battersby Black had fallen into leadership roles all her life, starting as early as her days as captain of the soccer team. "I felt like I was a leader and advocate," she says, "and that's kind of what I saw a lawyer's job and role as, so pursuing a legal career was a natural fit for me."

### STRATEGIC DETOUR BEFORE LAW SCHOOL

Although Battersby Black had always planned on getting her law degree, she took a strategic detour to develop herself professionally between earning her undergraduate degree at the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor and heading off to law school at Chicago-Kent College of Law.

"My dad advised me that those who go straight from their undergrad to law school aren't as well developed professionally, so take some time to do something professional," says Battersby Black.

At 21, she moved to Chicago and took a job

with JPMorgan Chase, developing a highly successful career as a financial analyst. Not only did Battersby Black gain experience and maturity, she says, but her time in finance also made her realize what she wanted out of a career in law.

“When I was working at the bank, I kind of felt like I was not helping people. I wasn’t making a difference in people’s lives,” says Battersby Black.

“I was always good with numbers and could crunch the numbers, but I didn’t really enjoy it, so when I went to law school, I knew I didn’t want to be a corporate or business lawyer or anything like that. I wanted to be a trial lawyer. I knew I wanted to be in front of a jury and persuade people.”

That feeling solidified during her first year in law school as a law clerk at Levin & Perconti when she worked on a nursing home trial. Battersby Black was prepping two young women who had lost their mother due to nursing home negligence.

“I had suffered a loss. I lost my mom when I was 23, so I really related with them, and I was able to help. That was kind of the turning point where I realized it was exactly what I wanted to do,” she recalls.

Battersby Black not only won that case but they also set a record verdict—a record Battersby Black broke during the trial she worked with Mary Periolat.

#### FEMALE PLAINTIFF ATTORNEYS’ CAUCUS

Battersby Black’s leadership and advocacy is not limited to the courtroom, however. As an active member of the Illinois Trial Lawyers Association (ITLA), she provides mentorship to female plaintiff attorneys as the inaugural chair of the association’s women’s caucus. Under her leadership, the women’s caucus presented a seminar in the spring of 2017 with a panel of majority female speakers who had either started their own law firms or were managing partners at larger law firms.

“Margaret and I have always talked about how there are some issues that are unique to women attorneys, specifically women plaintiff attorneys,” says Sarah King, a medical malpractice attorney for Clifford Law Offices in Chicago and one of the ITLA women’s caucus co-chairs. She and Battersby Black felt it was important to start a women’s caucus to “create another resource for women trial attorneys to help with career advancement and mentoring,” says King.

In a male-dominated industry, Battersby Black wanted to start mentoring other women to pay it forward for all the support she’s received throughout her career. She says she’s been fortunate to work at a law firm where

she’s had a female partner as a role model and male partners who’ve always been very supportive, encouraging and inclusive.

“There aren’t many women in this area of law,” says Battersby Black. “But my male partners promote women and are happy to be on equal footing with them, so I wanted to be able to pass that on to people who maybe aren’t so fortunate because they are at smaller firms where there aren’t a lot of women mentors or where women aren’t included or promoted as much as at my firm.”

King says Battersby Black was integral to the success of ITLA’s women’s caucus.

“Margaret is one of the most organized and highly effective women I have ever met,” says King. “Having her as the chair the first year of the caucus was just amazing because everything was new. Every event we did was new. There was no blueprint for it, so having Margaret be the one who was sort of laying the first blueprint for everything is perfect because, if I had to have a ‘Margaret blueprint’ for everything, it would be great.”

Many attorneys would probably also appreciate a “Margaret blueprint” for how to balance work with family life. Battersby Black says she’s the first woman at her law firm to have a baby in about 21 years.

“I think I’ve been able to help set an example and show some of the other new lawyer moms at my firm you can balance everything,” says Battersby Black. “It’s not easy, but just kind of how to try to make it all work.”

Battersby Black certainly has found a way to balance work and two kids—Evelyn, 5, and William, 3—with the help of her husband Jeff.

“At the same time that she’s a lawyer and stays on top of her cases—which is really hard to do these days—she seems to be an extremely involved and good mother with her kids,” says Periolat.

“She’s a great mom,” says King. “That’s really inspiring to watch from her, too. She has two adorable kids, and they’re a huge part of her life. She does a great job of balancing being a really great mom with being a really awesome attorney at the same time.”

Balance seems to be Battersby Black’s approach to most aspects of her life. Whether at home or in the courtroom, she says what makes her so good at what she does is a strong sense of fairness and levelheadedness. That approach helps her ensure her clients’ voices are heard.

“I have a way of being able to operate with a human perspective,” she says. “I can actually talk to my clients like real people, get to know them on a personal level, and make sure their stories are told the way they want them told.” ■