



## Sandra Collins and Teresa Mason

**L**ike many trailblazers, Sandra Collins (Sandy) (MS 87) didn't realize she was one until she was on the trail. Sandy started her undergraduate career in secretarial science at Humboldt State. Once she took bookkeeping and liked it, she then wanted to start taking accounting classes.

Sandy had to petition the instructor to be allowed to enroll in Accounting 1A. She excelled in the class and was told to keep going in the program. Sandy then changed her major to accounting and found a female mentor on the faculty who encouraged her to apply to work for the Big 8. Sandy went down to San Francisco, interviewed but did not get a job with any of the Big 8 at the time. Instead, she went to work for Alexander Grant — a firm that had not hired a female accountant before in that office, and seemed at a loss on how to utilize her skills. Sandy wasn't allowed out in the bullpen or to go see clients (a comment on the times, not the firm). She was bored to tears and went up to Humboldt to see her mentor, who told her she talked to the recruiter at Touche Ross who said he had seen an interesting resume from a female Humboldt accounting student. She contacted the recruiter and this time was hired as the first female accountant at Touche Ross, San Francisco. Sandy didn't know she was a trailblazer at the time; she just wanted to use her skills and have interesting work to do.

Sandy began her own practice in 1986. Some of her clients today go back to the 1960s when she started at Touche Ross! During this time, she began taking tax classes at Golden Gate University for continuing education, but realized she might as well just finish the masters in taxation, which she did in 1987.

While Sandy was blazing a trail in accounting, her daughter Teresa (MS 10) wanted to have nothing to do with the field. However, she started working in the office of a small engineering firm and saw how bad advice really affected the financial situation of the firm. She gave her mother quite a shock when she told her she wanted to go back to school and become a

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## Trailblazers

CPA. The mother/daughter team first started working together when Teresa was getting her degree at Cal State Hayward (now East Bay) and she worked for her mother part-time. When she finished her degree, she went to work in both audit and tax at Hood and Strong and stayed for two years before moving on to work at her mother's firm full time.

Teresa has been quite a trailblazer as well, and was one of the youngest chairs of CalCPA in 07-08. The board at the time was not reflecting the makeup of the profession, and Teresa's time as chair started the trend to make the board more diverse in every sense.

Today, Teresa is on the board of directors for AICPA and is the representative on the board from the smallest firm. Teresa's work and other commitments kept her completing the degree in taxation that she started in Golden Gate University in 1994 until 2009, but she says that the program was "the best thing she could have done for the area of practice she is in."

Teresa looks at the discrepancy between percentage of women in the field of tax and accounting (60%) and women as partners (18%) as the next trail to blaze for the profession. There needs to be a shift in corporate culture and firms need to see the idea of a part-time partner as something that fits into their practice. Larger firms do have women's initiative programs and are working on retention and promotion of women. It's in the company's best interest as well to train and develop staff that they do promote, and not have a brain drain of women staff. In a broader, cultural sense, men are becoming a lot more comfortable with women being the higher wage earner and the perceived "breadwinner."

Today, Teresa is the managing partner at Collins, Mason & Co. LLP and Sandy is content to work fewer hours and purely engage with her clients while Teresa manages all the inner workings of the business.

Collins, Mason & Co. LLP is sending two of their younger staff through the Golden Gate University master of science in taxation program. Their tax manager, Irene Fong, teaches in the Golden Gate University accounting program.