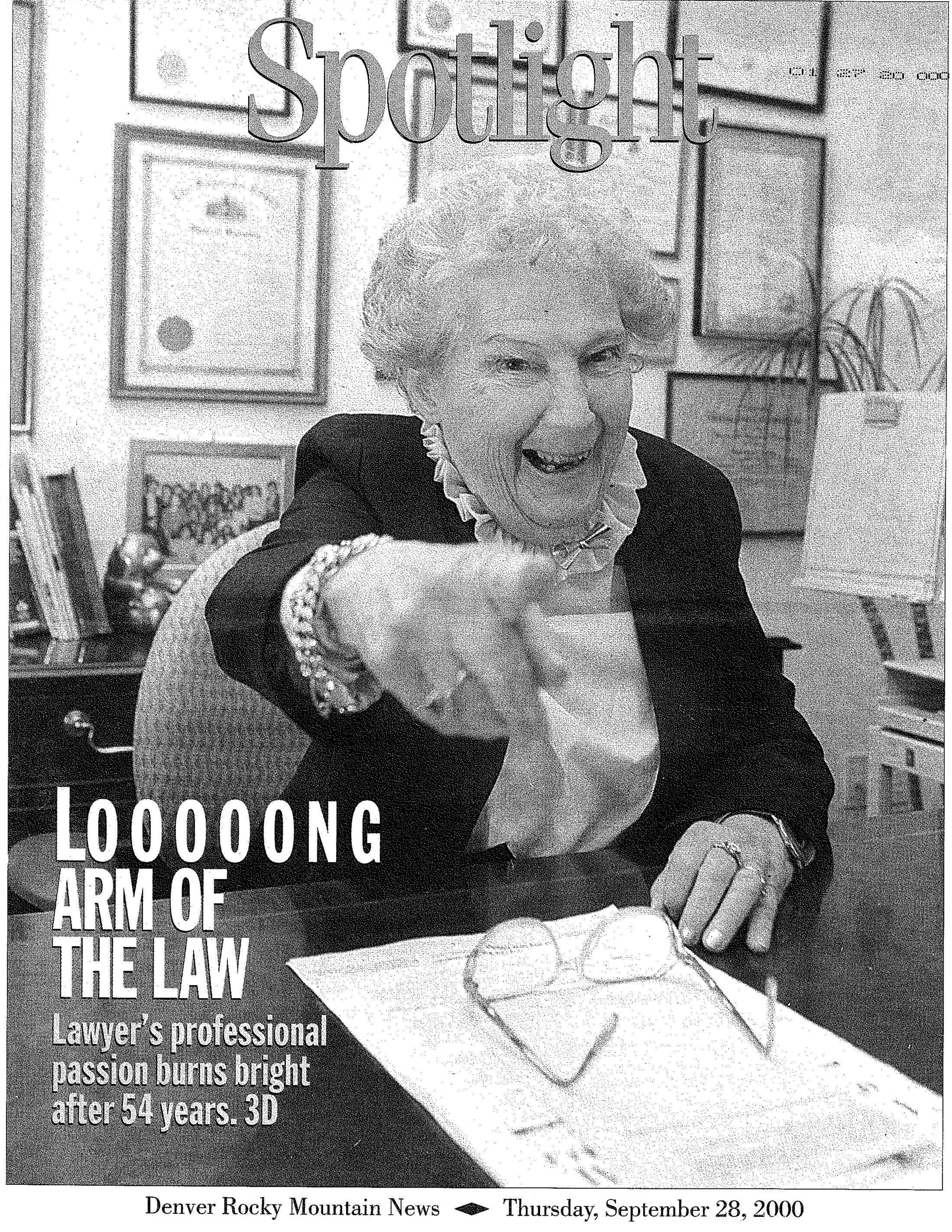


Spotlight



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LOOOOONG ARM OF THE LAW

Lawyer's professional
passion burns bright
after 54 years. 3D

Close-up

Mary Winter, Lifestyles Editor — (303) 892-5169 • e-mail: spotlight@RockyMountainNews.com

Attorney knows the letters of the law

By Mark Wolf

News Staff Writer

Brooke Wunnicke is working on a book of her life's memories. "I'm not important enough to have *memoirs*," she joked, eyes twinkling.

Objection, your honor, on the grounds of gross understatement.

She is 82, a lawyer for 54 years who shows up for work at the Denver firm of Hall & Evans five days a week. The third edition of her seventh book, on standby and commercial letters of credit, is due out next month, as is a supplement to her book on legal opinion letters. Her publisher wants her to submit two new book proposals. She will give three-hour lectures on professional ethics in each of the next two months.

Wunnicke's 17th-floor office is crowded with some of the honors she's received in the past two years. You can even sit on one of them: a handsome black chair with her name engraved on the back, which she received as the first recipient of the Frank H. Ricketson Jr. adjunct professor chair from the University of Denver, where she taught from 1978 through 1997.

"I love the law, warts and all. I know there are many things wrong with our system today, things I deplore. Yet I know it's the best legal system ever known to mankind."

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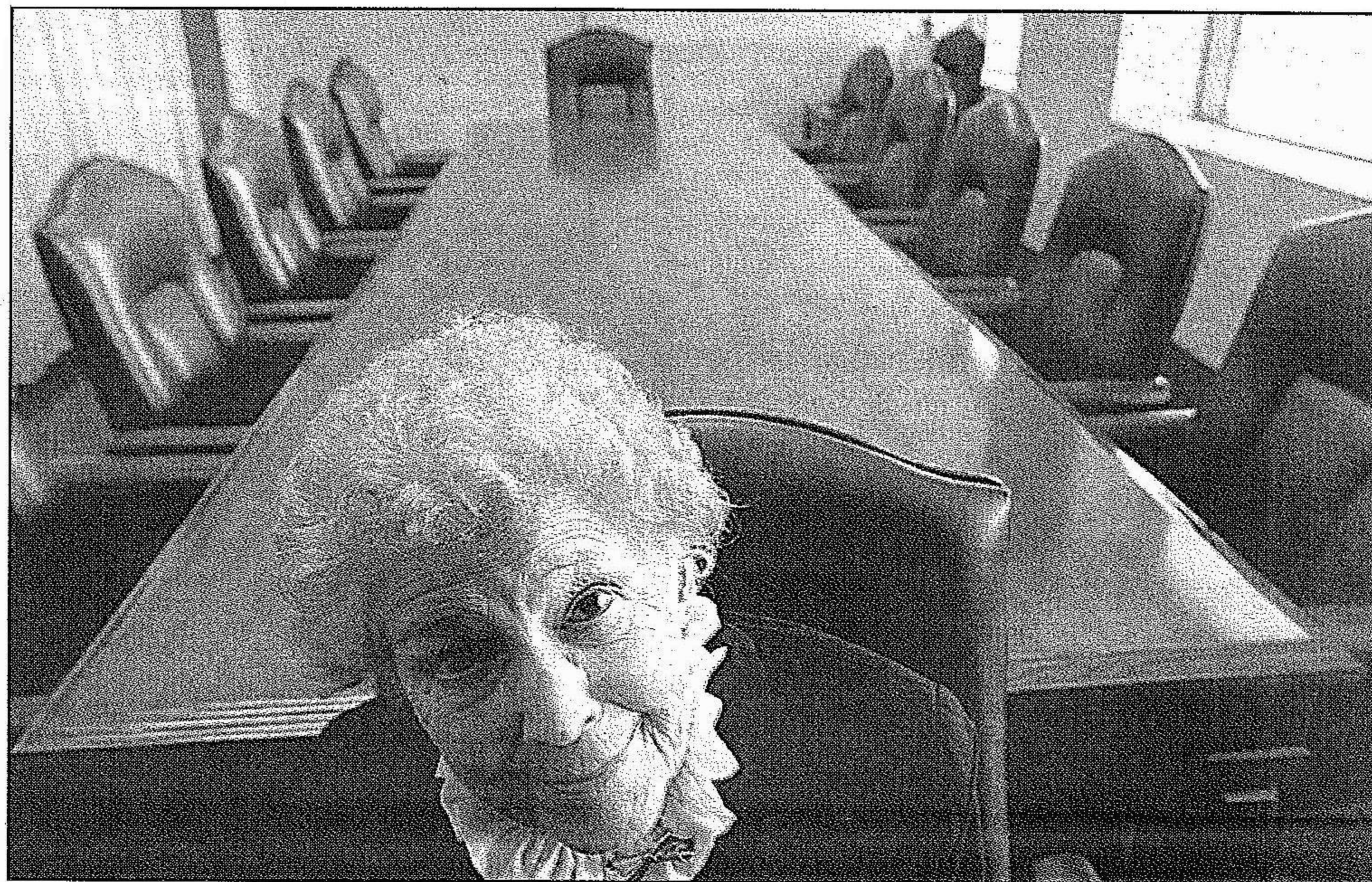
She taught oil-and-gas law at DU. Her farewell cake from her students, reflecting her love for Shakespeare, read: "Oil's Well That Ends Well — It's Been a Gas."

Though she lives steadfastly in the present, Wunnicke's past traces a watershed career.

After graduating Phi Beta Kappa from Stanford University, she attended the University of Southern California Law School, then transferred after a year to the University of Colorado, where she graduated first in her class.

She moved with her late husband, Stanford classmate James Wunnicke ("I married the first man I ever met from Wyoming"), to Cheyenne, where she was admitted to the Wyoming bar in 1946 and set up her own practice at a time when women weren't allowed to sit on juries and she was sometimes the only woman in the courtroom.

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Steven R. Nickerson/News Staff Photographer

At age 82, lawyer Brooke Wunnicke still shows up for work at the Denver firm of Hall & Evans five days a week.

BROOKE WUNNICKE

Age: 82

Family: Widowed; one daughter, Diane Wunnicke, a businesswoman who has co-written two books with her mother.

How she came to the law: "I wanted to be a lawyer since I was 12 years old. Nobody in my family was a lawyer or even liked lawyers. They were very artistic people and couldn't understand what happened with me. I got my law degree and my father said, 'Baby, it's what you always wanted and I'm happy for you, but I'll never know what it is I did or didn't do that one of my children should've turned out to be a lawyer.'"

Among her honors: 1999 Colorado Bar Association Award of Merit, the association's highest honor; 1999 Louis Potter Lifetime Professional Service Award (national honor from the Defense Research Institute); 1997 William Lee Knous Award (University of Colorado Law School's highest alumnus award); Eleanor P. Williams Arthritis Award for distinguished legal service and humanitarian contribution. She was the first female commencement speaker at CU's Law School in 1981.

Words to live by: She closes her ethics lectures with a quote from Roman Emperor Marcus Aurelius: "Never esteem aught of advantage which will oblige you to break your faith or desert your honor."

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"My husband was always very supportive of me, and that wasn't very politically mandated back then."

She handled almost 300 appeals in state and federal court.

"I helped make some important law," she said. "I tested the constitutionality of industrial-development revenue bonds, which for some years were an important factor in developing the high plains and Rocky Mountain region."

A federal judge once said she made his juries cry.

"Just in a good cause," she said. "Just in a good cause."

Her family moved to Denver in 1969, and she spent 13 years working for Dale Tooley in the Denver district attorney's

office, serving as chief appellate deputy.

She dreamed of becoming an appellate judge and was considered in 1978, but was not selected. She shifted her attention to writing legal books. "More people read my books than would ever read my opinions," she said.

She frequently serves as a mentor to young lawyers, whom she refers to as "my children."

"We're so lucky to have somebody like her at our firm," said Dan Satriana, chief executive officer of Hall & Evans. "I've gone to her many times with problems and issues, and she always has a perspective that's helpful. It's not just our younger lawyers but every lawyer in our firm who benefits from her experience and thoughtfulness."

"Younger lawyers can get caught up in the thrill of winning, and that can become a

little overarching with them. She's somebody who can explain and keep you focused not only on being a good lawyer but being a worthy advocate, being adversarial without being mean-spirited."

She'll consider retirement, she said, only when she doesn't look forward to coming to work every day. For now, she retains an abiding passion for her profession.

"If you don't love it, you should get out of it," she said. "I love the law, warts and all. I know there are many things wrong with our system today, things I deplore. Yet I know it's the best legal system ever known to mankind. As long as I'm alive and, God willing, mentally competent, I will do all that I can to see that it's practiced appropriately."

"I've seen a lot of changes in my profession, not always for the better. Over the years, the emphasis has changed from the professional to the business. There's a tremendous emphasis on the bottom line. I don't think advertising by lawyers has been a plus for our profession. I'm an old fogey on that, I guess."

She's been active in the Colorado and Wyoming bar associations throughout her career, and her frequent lectures on ethics emphasize perspective.

"I was aggressive on behalf of my clients, but you have to be aware of the ethical limits to advocacy and the propriety that should always be involved in the practice of law," she said.

"You lose your illusions in the first six months of practice, but a lawyer should never lose the ideals of our profession."

Contact Mark Wolf at (303) 892-5226 or wolfm@RockyMountainNews.com.

STATE & WEST

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DAILY CAMERA

3B

Lawyer keeps 'ideals of profession'

By Mark Wolf
Associated Press

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