

# Lauren Regan

## FIGHTING FOR YOUR RIGHTS

Lauren Regan of the Civil Liberties Defense Center (CLDC) recently defended her 800th activist. From forest activists and tar sands blockaders to the mentally ill, Regan has stood up for the rights of the outspoken and the disenfranchised from Oregon to Texas.

Regan knew she was going to be an attorney by the time she was 10 years old. At first she thought she was going to be a vet, she says, but that would involve blood, guts and sometimes hurting animals. "I wanted to be their lawyer and save them."

Regan says, "I announced to my family that I would be an animal rights lawyer." She knew, in some way, lawyers saved people and animals. She grew up in upstate New York, but came to the University of Oregon for law school because the Northwest was where she wanted to be. After working for a small public interest environmental law firm for five years, "I decided to throw out my own shingle."

She has no kids, citing the population explosion, and that childlessness allows her to live simply and flexibly "and do what I can do to defend the planet and make the world a better place and instill compassion in the way we live upon the Earth."

The impetus to found the nonprofit CLDC came from the era after the Seattle World Trade Organization protests when there was a lot of environmental activism going on, but there really weren't any lawyers specializing in defending activists, she says. "You had a choice of a public defender or a pro-bono lawyer doing criminal defense." The stakes got higher and someone familiar with the unique issues of politically active clients was needed. "Environmental law, activist defense and police misconduct, it's like one-stop shopping," Regan says of the CLDC.

Regan founded the CLDC in December 2003, and in addition to legal defense work, she and the organization put on "know your rights" trainings. While 800 activists in 10 years might sound like a lot of work, "when you like what you do, it doesn't seem tiresome," she says.

Regan is aided by her board of directors and other attorneys doing work pro-bono, she says, and she's also tried to duplicate the CLDC by training law clerks and mentoring young attorneys — about 100 in the past 10 years. Mentee Rebecca Smith is about to file her first police misconduct case in Missoula, Mont., and Regan says CLDC has tried to spread its work across the country.

Regan says that some of her cases have been systemic fixes that challenge laws and get them eradicated from the books so no other activists will be subjected to them. She cites the Josh Schlossberg case in Eugene: She successfully argued in federal court that a Eugene police officer, Bill Solesbee, violated Schlossberg's Fourth Amendment rights by searching the contents of his camera without a warrant. "Not only did it set a pretty national precedent for what copwatchers are allowed to do, it also dealt with a problematic cop in our community," she says.

Her work has met with some backlash, but "not as much as you would expect." She sometimes has difficulties flying, and after successfully defending forest activists in rural Gold Beach, Ore., the sheriffs escorted her to the county line when she left, she laughs. "But it's nothing that would ever deter me from wanting to do more and more."

Regan says her passion for defending activists and marginalized communities is part of her success. The government pays people 40 hours a week to do their jobs, she says, "but we would do this work for free and work 90 to their 40, so despite the billions of dollars the feds put in to destroy those movements, we are not only right, we are more committed."

Still, her parents ask her, "Couldn't you just do wills or divorces? Do you have to sue FBI agents?" — *Camilla Mortensen*



# NAACP

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