Justice Kay McFarland Award recipient Martha Hodgesmith moved us with a passionate speech which touched upon her professional, social, and personal goals as a lawyer, as a member of the Women Attorneys Association of Topeka, and as a wife, mother, and grandmother. Ms. Hodgesmith also spotlighted some of the special people with whom she shared part of her life journey including honoring the memory of her late husband, John McElroy, who not only supported her involvement in WAAT but who also actively participated in WAAT as well as in the Kansas Women Attorneys Association.

Ms. Hodgesmith explained, “It was a gift to be able to go to law school and graduate from law school and begin my work when I did because my law school class at the University of Kansas was one of the first to have a significant percentage of women as law school graduates and because my undergraduate degree from KU was in anthropology and sociology and it was the first opportunity to be a major in women studies.”

She also spoke of the importance of being part of WAAT and KWAA from the beginning and the decision that she and a group of women attorneys made many years ago to be active participants in the KBA. “Today the Kansas Bar Association reflects the involvement and the leadership of women in the general bar and obviously our success in both Topeka and statewide is seen in creating this award and in creating the Jennie Mitchell Kellogg Achievement Award and in our efforts to make the statewide meeting of women attorneys in Lindsborg, Kansas the event that brings together women from across the state and across generations and that is the important thing to me throughout my career.”

Emphasizing the importance of younger women attorneys being passionate advocates, Ms. Hodgesmith stated, “What is really most important now is that we who have seen what it was like before women became so pervasive—we are pervasive and we are everywhere but we aren’t everywhere we thought we would be and so that means we have to keep working to insure that women are more effectively represented in the judiciary, in the legislative and in the executive branch. I think it’s really important that that passion be taken on by younger women attorneys because those of us who began in the 1970’s didn’t think that we would have to be advocating for some very basic things that younger women can and should feel like they can take for granted.”

Ms. Hodgesmith shared her passion about the importance of the history of women attorneys in Kansas as something that we need to keep in the forefront of our minds so that we continue to update and get the oral histories from women attorneys, continue to mentor younger female attorneys, and continue the vital work of ensuring that the administration of justice in Kansas is achieved through access to justice, professionalism and non-partisanship.