

Amalya Lyle Kears

By TOM GOLDSTEIN

When Amalya L. Kears is sworn in to the United States Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit, she will become the first woman ever to sit on the Federal appeals court in Manhattan and only the second black in the court's history. (Thurgood Marshall, now on the United States Supreme Court, was the first). At the age of 42, she will be one of the youngest persons to sit on what is considered by many lawyers to be the most important court in the country, after the United States Supreme Court.

Miss Kears is a person of apparent contradictions. She loves physical activity, yet has chosen the contemplative path. Strangers are struck by her reserved demeanor, but those who know her well speak of her warmth. She is enthusiastic about her avocations and is a tournament bridge player, yet her work weeks stretch to 100 hours, leaving her little time for diversion.

Her nomination is a result, in part, of President Carter's desire to have more blacks and women on the Federal bench; yet Miss Kears is not particularly identified with championing women's causes or those of blacks.

The Senate confirmed the nomination of Miss Kears, a trial lawyer, by voice vote last Tuesday, and she is to be sworn in on Wednesday.

Praise From Partners

Because of her youth, Miss Kears, the first female black partner in a major Wall Street firm, is not yet widely known in Manhattan's legal community. But her partners at Hughes Hubbard & Reed and lawyers from other firms who have worked both with and against her have nothing but praise for her talents.

"She became a partner here not because she is a woman, not because she is a black, but because she is just so damned good — no question about it," said Orville Schell, a senior partner at the Hughes Hubbard firm.

"She has a slightly glacial exterior, but she is a delightful person," said Jay Topkis, a partner at Paul, Weiss, Rifkin, Wharton & Garrison. "I don't know of an appointment that I have been so enthusiastic about in quite some time." Mr. Topkis recently worked with Miss Kears on a case that went to the Supreme Court.

The past two years have been almost nonstop work for Miss Kears. "You get involved in lawsuits, and things happen," she said in a recent interview. It was during lunch hour, but she was sitting in her corner office at Wall Street and Broadway, for she rarely has time for lunch.

"You work a lot, almost all the time, every weekend and evening," she said. "Working days are 12 to 15 hours long. Literally, there is no time for anything else."

Miss Kears lives in a Greenwich Village apartment building, as do many other lawyers.

She joined the firm shortly after she graduated near the top of her class from the University of Michigan Law School in 1962. She was named a partner seven years later. Since 1973, she

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The New York Times

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has headed the firm's hiring committee.

She plays on the firm's softball team and is an agile forward on its women's basketball team, but her long hours at work take their toll on her best-known hobby, bridge.

One of Top Bridge Players

She is considered among the most talented bridge players in the country, and is the author, editor and translator of several books and articles about bridge. Lately, her writing about bridge has taken time from actual playing.

Similarly, it is her interest in writing that attracted her to the Federal appeals court.

A couple of years ago Miss Kears decided against applying for an opening on the Federal district court in Manhattan where trials are held. She decided instead to pursue the appellate opening, she said, because "I've always like to write and engage in legal analysis."

Amalya Lyle Kears was born June 11, 1937, in Vauxhall, N.J. where her late father was postmaster and her mother first practiced medicine and then became an antipoverty official.

"My father always wanted to be a lawyer," Miss Kears recalled. "The Depression had a lot to do with why he didn't. I got a lot of encouragement."

At Wellesley, where she majored in philosophy, she decided what she wanted to be. "I decided I wanted to be a litigator," she said. "I can trace that back to a course in international law at Wellesley. There was a moot court, and I found that very enjoyable."