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## Titan Of The Plaintiffs Bar: Bernstein's Katie Sinderson

By **Reenat Sinay**

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Katie Sinderson knew from childhood that she wanted to be a lawyer, but playing a witness in her mother's moot court competitions as a middle schooler really made the law come alive. Watching her mom, a former schoolteacher, pursue her dream of becoming an attorney further propelled Sinderson toward what has become a lifelong passion, she says.

"I was very shaped by mom's experience and how much she loved it and how much she loved litigation and the advocacy portion of it," she says. "That was pretty formative for me and my ambitions for what I thought was possible."

Now a partner at Bernstein Litowitz Berger & Grossmann LLP in New York, Sinderson is at the top of her game, scoring **\$74 million** for investors in a settlement with renewable energy giant SunEdison Inc. in October and **\$50 million** for shareholders of fuel-card company FleetCor Technologies Inc. in December, earning her a spot among Law360's 2020 Titans of the Plaintiffs Bar.

Growing up the daughter of a butcher and teacher-turned-lawyer in Oklahoma City, the 39-year-old notes that her background — a public school education, then Baylor University and Georgetown Law on scholarships — set her apart from the average law student or lawyer.

But her working class roots are the very thing that put her on the path to the plaintiffs bar, she says.

"I always wanted to be on the side of the good guys, and from my perspective that was being on the side of the little guys or the working class," Sinderson says. "There's the feeling that you're on the right side of things. You know you're getting up and fighting every day for the security of the investments and the retirements of teachers, of cops, of firefighters, of laborers."

She recently advocated for investors in the three-year-long class action against SunEdison, which she says was touted on Wall Street as "the next big thing" just months before diving into bankruptcy, taking the life savings of many people with it.

The litigation proved especially challenging due to its duration and to all the moving pieces: The renewable energy company's 2016 bankruptcy filing meant that there was a depleting pool of recoverable assets for plaintiffs to go after in the lawsuits SunEdison was facing from all sides over its faulty internal



**Katie Sinderson**  
Bernstein Litowitz

### What Influenced Her Career:

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controls.

"This case went from 2016 to 2019 principally because it was so hard to find a resolution that the defendants could agree to that didn't leave them totally exposed to all these other cases, but also got us the greatest share for the investors we were hearing from," she says. "Just navigating these constant mediations and negotiations was a tremendous challenge and learning opportunity, and it felt like an enormous success once it got to the end."

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In SunEdison, as in all of her cases, Sinderson took a strategic and fact-intensive approach to her work, digging deep into the issues and conducting investigative work alongside her team, she says.

Becoming "a master of the facts" of each case has made Sinderson a highly sought-after teammate, according to Chad Johnson, who worked with her during his time at Bernstein and is currently a partner at Robbins Geller Rudman & Dowd LLP.

"She's got the rare combination of a supersmart, tough advocate who's always personable but on the substance is tough as nails," Johnson says.

"She's so easy to work with, but also when it comes to the issues she doesn't give an inch unnecessarily," he adds, chalking it up to her Oklahoma upbringing. "She's one of the lawyers in the field that I respect the most."

With a voice that radiates both warmth and self-assurance, Sinderson has spent her entire career at Bernstein Litowitz, joining straight out of law school — an unusual feat, as most plaintiffs attorneys spend their first few years on the defense side learning the ins and outs of corporations before switching over.

She credits her many mentors at the firm with helping to shape her into the lawyer she is today, including name partner Max Berger, managing partner Sal Graziano and **senior partner Hannah Ross**, with whom she is also organizing a women's forum for the plaintiffs side of the securities litigation industry set for later this year.

Ross has worked alongside Sinderson since she joined the firm and the two "have been in the trenches" together on several cases, according to Ross.

"She's someone who I always want on my team," Ross says. "She's very talented, very smart, very articulate. She's an extraordinarily strategic thinker, so she's always looking ahead, thinking about what the next step is and what we're trying to accomplish."

Sinderson says that Ross' diligence and perfectionism raised her own standards for the firm and for herself, and that she hopes to pass those lessons on with the mentorship initiative both she and Ross are involved with at the firm.

Fostering a sense of community comes naturally to Sinderson and has proved to be an important support system as she has advanced through the ranks. During her first month at Bernstein Litowitz, she says she was "pretty brash" and emailed all the women at the firm to invite them to dinner. That first women's dinner turned into a regular event, and the firm has since added biweekly women's lunches as well, she says.

"It's a really valuable community to have," Sinderson says. "I really enjoy mentoring all lawyers — men and women — but there is something to be said for women reminding each other that we can be ourselves."

Looking ahead, Sinderson is focusing on representing investors in three big and very different cases.

She recently **won class certification** for her clients in a suit accusing pharmaceutical giant Novo Nordisk of covering up a kickback scheme in return for access to insulin. Sinderson is also representing shareholders suing Boeing for **allegedly hiding safety problems** with its 737 Max jets

ahead of two plane crashes that killed a total of 346 people.

She is also forging ahead with a **\$16 billion proposed class action** against Kraft Heinz Co. over its damaging post-merger cost-cutting practices and the resulting multibillion-dollar stock drop.

"I find the experience of being a plaintiffs lawyer so tremendously rewarding," she says. "It makes you want to do the incredible hard work because every day you're going toe-to-toe with the Skaddens, the Cravaths, the Clearys — all these enormous firms with enormous teams with enormous resources, so you have to pour yourself into this work."

--Editing by Breda Lund.

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