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— **Law Firm of the Month**

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— **Boutique Law Firm of the Month**

Newmark Law Firm

— **Bar Certified Tax Specialist**



Kristen Curry

By Pamela Ellgen

She Rocks: A Candid Conversation with Defense Attorney Kristen Curry

The smile in her voice put her clients at ease when they first encounter defense attorney Kristen Curry, of the Phoenix firm Curry, Pearson & Wooten PLC. Her warmth and compassion belie the formidable knowledge and experience she brings to her profession. With 12 years as a bar-certified criminal defense attorney, a listing in the Bar Register of Preeminent Lawyers, and the distinction of Southwest SuperLawyer, a listing of the top five percent of lawyers in each state, Kristen is at the top of her game.

Recently, Attorney at Law had the opportunity to chat with Kristen about her journey from a budding acting career into the legal profession, how she selected her specialization and the challenges she sees on the horizon in her field.

When and why did you first develop an interest in the law field?

Actually, I never thought about becoming an attorney growing up. There were no attorneys in my family. When I was in college at UCLA, the idea really came to me suddenly – it just seemed like a natural choice since I had a background doing theatre and some television acting growing up. I was comfortable being in front of people and I figured that courtroom work was probably similar to acting. At least it appeared that way on “L.A. Law,” which was a big hit during that time. So when I made the decision that I was going to go to



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law school, I decided to change my major to something I enjoyed - history. I thought that history would also prepare me for law school because it required a lot of reading and writing. Wrong! Law school was like learning a foreign language; nothing prepared me for it.

What sort of acting did you do; anything we might have seen?

Maybe. I grew up in Arizona so mostly I did television projects that were filmed here and some theatre too. “Grizzly Adams” was probably my biggest part – and yes, I got to meet Ben the Bear. I also did some commercials like McDonalds, Hubba Bubba

Bubble Gum, Hardees Hamburgers and Chevrolet. It was fun but I knew I didn’t want to go in that direction as I got older. Show business is tough and I needed something more stable.

How did you choose your specialization?

I never expected to go into criminal law when I entered law school. But during my second year, I ended up doing a 38(e) Internship with the Pima County Attorney’s Office. I found it intriguing. I also clerked for a criminal defense attorney in Tucson. After law school, I started as an associate in a civil practice but I really yearned to get in the courtroom so I joined the Maricopa County Public Defender’s Office. Once I got there, I truly enjoyed the work and my colleagues. Defense work is never boring and always challenging; it requires you to be creative and think on your feet. I was able to hone my courtroom skills rather quickly and get a lot of experience in front of a jury. When I left the public defender’s office in 1998, I wanted to continue to practice criminal defense, and I’ve been doing it in private practice ever since.

What are the unique challenges of criminal defense?

The time crunch that the courts and prosecutors put us through. The courts want us to move our cases along really quickly, but so much is at stake. It is amazing that civil cases can take years but when a person’s liberty hangs in the balance, it’s



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sometimes difficult to get a judge to agree to a continuance for more preparation time. It can be quite stressful. Also, in the plea bargaining process, the prosecutors put deadlines on plea offers that give little time to investigate or conduct discovery.

Like others in my specialization, I am occasionally asked, “How can you defend people who commit crimes?” Truthfully, whether someone is guilty or innocent is not my focus. I am still going to defend them in the best way I can. I am there to make sure that an individual’s rights are protected. Part of my job is making sure that police do *their* job. If the police conduct an illegal search or coerce a confession, then I will call them out on it.

Oftentimes, criminal defense is simply “damage control.” I try to convey to the prosecutor and the courts that there is more to my client than just the criminal charge. When trying to get a lower plea offer or a reduced sentence, it’s important to show the good things that a client has done in his life. I deal with a lot of young people who make dumb choices and who don’t really think about the consequences. If I can resolve a case where a client still has a chance at a decent future, then it’s been a good day.

What are some upcoming changes facing the criminal defense field?

I have taught search and seizure to other attorneys for about 12 years now. Because of this, I try to keep myself apprised of

At a Glance

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all of the new cases coming out. I see constitutional rights dwindling. We're getting less protection from the courts and the concept of "privacy" isn't what people expect. The technological advances in computers, cellphones, and GPS devices allow government to delve into our private lives more and more. The courts have started to address these issues but there are many more cases to come. Unfortunately, I'm not optimistic about how things are going.

What are some important lessons you've learned along the way?

You can attract more flies with honey than vinegar. There is a time and place for being aggressive and tough and it is not always wise to take that stance. Part of being a good defense attorney is to know when and how to pick your battles. It's important to have a reputation with prosecutors that you will work hard on your cases and are not afraid to go to trial. But it's equally important to be professional in your dealings with them. The last thing you need is for your client to be penalized because of something you did.

Outside of the law field, what are your passions?

I sing in a rock band. I think the performer in me has never left. My band plays in different bars and other venues once or twice a month. It keeps me grounded. I like the fact that I don't have to "think," I can just be creative and have fun. I've been singing with bands long before I became a lawyer and it's something I truly enjoy. I also love spending time with my daughter and husband at our cabin in Prescott. I like the peace and relaxation of the forest.

Have you ever sung in the courtroom?

No, but I've thought about trying it during a closing argument to shake things up. I would probably be held in contempt!

How do your colleagues influence your practice?

My partners and I have been working together since 2003. We all have different personality styles and that seems to work out well. Mike Pearson, who does civil litigation and aviation law, is very driven and is great at complicated legal issues. I tend to look at things from a layperson's perspective since I do a lot of jury trials and Robert Wooten is an excellent negotiator. We bounce a lot of case ideas off of each other to get a different perspective. It's a good balance.



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