

ATTORNEY AT LAW

MAGAZINE

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By Paula Hubbs Cohen

Kathyrn A. Pidgeon

Kathyrn Pidgeon has helped more than 1,000 children become part of 'forever families.'

That's an astonishing legacy, in anyone's book.

But she didn't start her career path in the adoption field. She actually wanted to be a teacher. "But my father convinced me to be an attorney," she says sheepishly. "I pursued going back to school to get my teaching degree but when I was told that none of the credits from law school would transfer, I was so frustrated. Then I became pregnant with my first son and decided to put another degree on the back burner."

In between children, Kathy had the opportunity to work at an adoption agency where she was first introduced to adoption law ("there were no adoption-law courses in law school") "It became apparent that this was the type of law that would touch my heart and where I could feel like I was making a profound difference in people's lives," she says.

Now in her twenty-first year as a sole practitioner, Kathy is a charter member of the American Academy of Adoption Attorneys, an invitation-only group of experts in adoption

law scattered throughout the country. "I emphasize adoption law and dependency law, and I handle newborn adoptions as well as grandparent and step-parent adoptions," she explains. "I have represented many foster children in the DES system and currently represent families who are adopting foster children."

Nominated by adoptive parents Tom and Lynda Smock, Kathy received a Congressional award (the "Angel in Adoption Award") in 2004 for her pro bono work and for her work with children in the foster care system. In addition, in 2007, she received the Family Building Hero Award from RESOLVE, a national fertility association.

Along with accolades from birth mothers and adoptive parents and families, Kathy also receives high marks from those with whom she works on a professional basis, including Thomas Jacobs, a retired judge pro tem/commissioner assigned to the juvenile division of superior court. Jacobs, who retired from the bench in 2008 recalls that he first met Kathy in the early 1990s when he started doing an adoption calendar at court. "Between 2003 and 2008, I handled



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adoptions exclusively which gave me more contact with Kathy. After I retired, I chose to remain in contact with her due to her dedication and support of the Arizona Friends of Foster Children Foundation. She has given endless hours over the years to this worthwhile organization for foster children.”

Maricopa County Juvenile Court Presiding Judge Norman Davis told Attorney at Law that the legal profession in Maricopa County has a long tradition of volunteer and pro bono service to the community. “I’m privileged to know many attorneys and judicial officers that give back to their community on a regular basis without expectation of any personal gain other than the satisfaction that naturally comes with helping others,” says Judge Davis. “Kathy not only exemplifies this tradition of community service, but takes it to the next level by selflessly raising funds to support volunteer activities and events that can only occur with such efforts.”

Pregnant and Scared

Kathy explains that what makes her emotion-filled job worthwhile is stories like the one about Lauren, who was a young college student in Michigan when she became pregnant by her abusive boyfriend. Lauren’s family has a vacation home in Arizona, so she and her mother came here to wait out the end of the pregnancy.

Lauren and her mother were referred to Kathy’s office by their OB/GYN and Kathy remembers that Lauren was very scared, very traumatized. “She decided she wanted an open adoption, which is very common nowadays,” says Kathy, noting that Lauren and her mom asked to be introduced to families in Arizona. “But I pointed out to her the difficulties she would have in maintaining an open adoption if she chose an Arizona family since she was going to go back and live in her home state of Michigan. So we worked with an out-of-state attorney and finally found the perfect match.”

Happy Endings

While most adoptions eventually have happy endings, unfortunately, devastating things sometimes do take place. In fact, Larry and Kathy Furlong of Paradise Valley endured three failed adoptions, including one in which they got to know a birth mother very well, even attending the birth of the daughter they were told would be theirs.

“In Arizona, a birth mother has 72 hours to sign over final consent, and in that specific case, Larry and Kathy had taken the baby home from the hospital. Just before the 72 hours was up, the birth mom called and said she couldn’t sign the papers,” says Kathy. “I actually had to pry the baby out of



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Larry’s arms. It was obviously traumatizing for all of us, but of course, most especially and horribly for them.”

Fast forward to 2004. The Furlongs had decided to pursue surrogacy and Kathy had referred them to an out-of-state attorney who handles this complicated legal issue. They were just days away from flying to the Midwest to meet a possible surrogate when the phone rang in Kathy’s office. “It was the Monday of the President’s Day holiday weekend and my assistant and I had miscommunicated about working that day,” says Kathy. “I had actually intended for her to take the day off, but as luck would have it, she was in the office when the phone rang. A birth mother had just delivered a boy that morning and had no plans for his adoption. The social worker had called other attorneys and agencies, but everyone was closed because of the holiday – except us.”

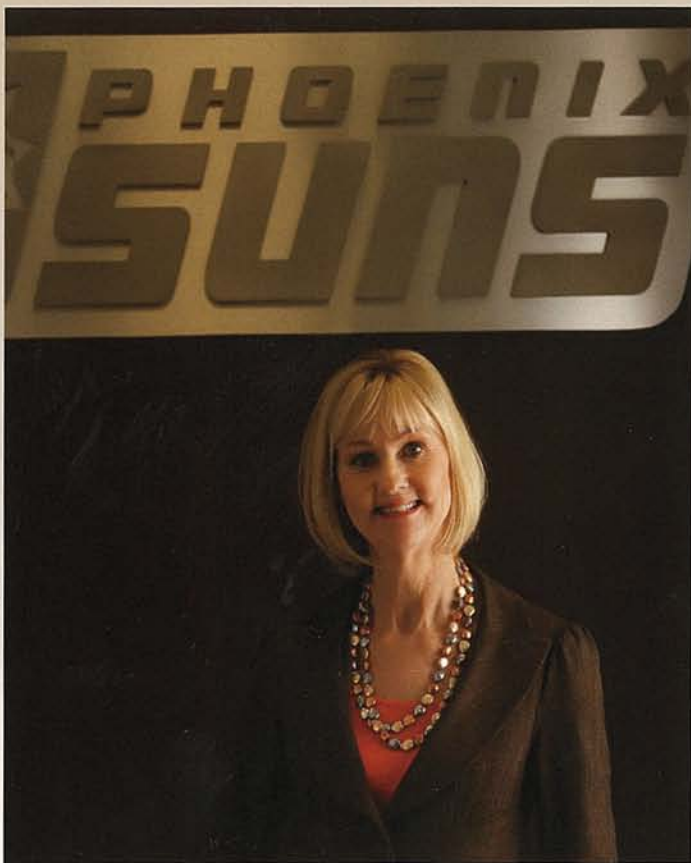
Kathy called the Furlongs and told them the story. Would they be interested in pursuing this beautiful 10-pound baby boy? Larry simply said, “We’re in.”

A long story short: Harrison Furlong is now six years old and the Furlongs send flowers to Kathy every President’s Day.

Unique Open Adoption

Due to a perfect storm of extremely bad circumstances, a sibling group (ages 3, 4 and 7) became available for adoption, but the birth family insisted they all be adopted together – AND – that the adoption be open, allowing them plenty of visitation with the kids and the opportunity to be an important and consistent part of the children’s lives.

“I knew this would be very hard, but I agreed to do some research on the situation,” recalls Kathy. “I went back to my office, and lo and behold, there was an email from Lynda Smock. It read: ‘We have searched our hearts and have decided since we have raised two children already, we don’t need kids in diapers again. We would like to find a sibling



group of no more than three kids with at least one girl. Can you help us?”

At the time, Tom was recovering from being injured on the job, the situation had taken a toll on the couple's finances. “So I did the adoption of these three children pro bono. We needed two other attorneys, one for the birth mother and one for severance from the birth father, and I was able to get the whole thing underwritten by a foundation.”

Moved by Kathy's ability to take on such an enormous task, the Smocks nominated her for the Congressional award she received in 2004.

“That's what keeps me doing it,” says Kathy. “Not any awards, but the fact that most of the stories have happy endings, with girls like Lauren being able to get back on their feet and families that become whole through the addition of much-loved children. I feel like it is a mission for me, something God has asked me to do. It's just such an honor to be chosen to walk this journey with these children and families.”

A Young Birth Mother's Story: In Her Own Words

“I was still in college and barely 21 when I found out I was pregnant. I had no way to support a baby financially and her birth father was not going to be in the picture. Kathy said she would do everything in her power to find me my perfect family, and she did just that when I was 8 1/2 months pregnant. I got a weird feeling when my mom called to tell me about their profile because I just knew they were the one

and it has worked out to be a miracle and a blessing. She spends the night at my house and I babysit her when the parents are out or for weekends when they are on a mini-vacation. She calls me Bami (birth mommy) and she knows exactly who I am. Kathy is a gift that God sent me to help keep me strong. She guarded me and fought for me and my beautiful daughter even when I didn't have the knowledge or power to fight for us myself.”

“...Lauren recently graduated from Indiana University and is soon starting her first professional job. Her daughter is now four years old.”

At a Glance

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Personal:

Married 28 years to Steven D. Pidgeon,
co-managing partner at DLA Piper in Phoenix

Three sons, all of whom graduated from Brophy Prep

- Tyler: Graduated from Boston College, currently a third-year medical student at Tufts University
- Greg: Junior at Boston College, majoring in business, currently studying abroad at Kings College
- Austin: Sophomore at Santa Clara University, majoring in English, is also a musician whose first EP just came out on iTunes
- Grew up in Queens, New York

Education:

- Attended PS 11, Garden Country Day School. Graduated SUNY Plattsburg and University of Miami (JD)

Professional:

- Executive Director of the Phoenix Suns Charities
- Former member of the Foster Care Review Board; served in that capacity for three years prior to representing children in the system
- Past president and has served for 25 years on the board of the Arizona Friends of Foster Children Foundation
- Juvenile Court Pro Tem Judge
- Past president of the Brophy College Preparatory's Mothers Guild
- Past president of the school board of Ss Simon & Jude school
- Currently on the board of NotMyKid, an organization that serves to bring awareness and foster prevention against drugs and alcohol abuse amongst children
- Assisted in drafting the Adoption Rules for the Maricopa County Juvenile court as well as the Birth Father Rights legislation.
- For the past 6 years, co chaired, with fellow attorney Janet Story, the National Adoption Day celebration for Maricopa County