

Lynn Murray

Taking on High Stakes on the Job and at Home

by Elizabeth Davies

Clients might not consider motherhood as one of Lynn Haggman Murray's assets when they hire her as their attorney, but she definitely has sharper skills because of it.

As a top lawyer at Chicago's **Grippo & Elden LLC**, Murray handles high-stakes corporate legal matters and does so with the confidence of someone who can face hard work dead on.

"She is a go-to trial attorney nationwide for several of the firm's clients," says colleague Todd Jacobs. "I have had the pleasure of working with a number of outstanding trial lawyers across the country, but if I were a client, Lynn would be at the head of my list for the toughest, most thorny cases."

Just as her legal expertise is anything but ordinary, so is her parenting. Murray's children include a set of triplets followed by a set of twins. That kind of household management has translated into making her a better lawyer, she says.

"The most obvious factor is organization and efficiency," Murray says. "When you have three babies, then three young kids and two more babies, at home you have to make every minute count. That translates to the workplace."

And as every good parent—and good lawyer—knows, you have to pick your battles.

"It also helps your negotiation skills," Murray laughs. "It helps you learn when it's important to stand firm and when it's important to give ground. Some lawyers want to stand firm all the time, and that's not necessarily a good legal strategy."

Managing a High-Stakes Career

In 2012, Resolute Management, Inc. requested Murray just a few weeks before trial for a coverage case in Delaware. The company considers her a top attorney for managing their "unique, complex, volatile insurance coverage cases," says Vicky Russell, vice president of Resolute's legal division.

"Lynn has a deep understanding of our business goals and pressures, and she earned our confidence by telling it straight," she says. "Lynn has dropped in at the 11th hour to salvage a case going to trial. She can dismantle a very dry coverage case into the essential issues and create a compelling story."

Murray considers that key to doing her job well. She understands that insurance matters aren't particularly thrilling for juries, so she finds a way to weave a tale that will capture them.

Representing insurance companies often means "taking a defendant that people aren't naturally drawn to and humanizing the story, having your client be the good guy, making a dry subject matter interesting," she says.

In that Delaware case, Hurricane Wilma struck in the middle of trial, leaving Murray stuck in the hotel for three days with opposing counsel.

"She jumped in and made difficult scientific issues come alive for a jury," Russell says.

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“Lynn’s drive and determination to win, paired with her civility, creativity and smarts, set her apart from the crowd.”

The jury in that case made unique scientific findings, which currently are the subject of hotly contested post-trial briefings in this closely watched case.

Jacobs of Grippo & Elden has worked alongside Murray for 22 years. He serves with her on the firm’s three-member executive committee.

“She is an excellent strategist,” he says. “From the beginning of a case, she maps a path to the optimal outcome. In an era when not many cases are tried, Lynn has tried and won numerous bench and jury trials. This trial ‘readiness’ often leads to increased settlement leverage and optimal settlement outcomes.”

Jacobs has been the firm’s managing partner since 2006, when Murray stepped down from that role.

“From a management perspective, she brings creativity and energy to the table and is a trusted leader of the firm,” he says.

Jacobs collaborated with Murray recently on the defense of several major insurance companies in coverage litigation in California. She was the lead counsel for Fireman’s Fund Insurance Company and co-lead for a group of 10 defendants in similar litigation. The case stands out in Murray’s mind because of the money at stake—the plaintiffs sought hundreds of millions—and because of its groundbreaking issues. The case involved several bench trials with a range of issues such as lost policies and equitable defenses.

One California Superior Court trial lasted six weeks and hinged on Murray’s cross-examination of her opponent’s longtime lawyer.

One of Murray’s favorite tactical decisions during that trial, however, involved delegation. She asked a fourth-year associate on her team to question certain handwriting experts, knowing that the testimony was important but dry. She banked on the audience perking up and paying attention to the associate’s questioning, rooting for him to do well in a high-pressure environment.

In the end, the judge wrote a 123-page opinion in her client’s favor, finding for the client on a broad range of issues.

Rewarded by a Job Well Done

That’s the kind of work Murray thrives on, the chance to dig deep to find the truth—and convince others to believe it as well.

“Day to day, you’re always driving toward convincing somebody you are right,” she says. “That came through in depositions, and it came through in the trial.”

She understands how difficult these cases are for clients. Often, there are millions of dollars at stake. She prepares clients from the onset that litigation is a roller coaster. There may be interim wins and losses, but she focuses them on the end game.

Ultimately, helping clients through those tough circumstances is the best part of her job.

“I’m typically dealing with some pretty high-stakes problems, and clients are worried about them,” she says. “To help relieve their burden is rewarding.”

In 2011, Murray successfully represented Snap-On Business Solutions in a patent infringement indemnification case. Hyundai Motor America was seeking indemnification for a \$34 million patent verdict and substantial defense costs. Murray uncovered information showing that an insurance company had been ordered to pay a significant percentage of those bills, something that hadn’t been disclosed in discovery. Hyundai voluntarily dismissed its complaint after a special master issued a ruling recommending sanctions and while the District Court was considering whether to award additional sanctions.

Philip O’Connell Jr., a partner with Dentons in Boston, has worked with Murray for the past eight years and describes her as perhaps the best trial lawyer he has ever met.

“There really is no talent that is useful in litigation that Ms. Murray does not possess in abundance,” he says. “Superb cross-examiner, gifted in working with groups of lawyers, brilliant strategist, meticulous in implementing strategies.”

In her career, Murray has accomplished many of her goals. She has handled appeals in Illinois state courts and in the 4th, 7th, 8th, 9th and Federal Circuits. She graduated in 2010 from Harvard Law School’s “Leadership in Law Firms” Executive Education Program. She has been profiled in *Chicago Lawyer* and quoted in a *Newsweek* article about mothers who work while their husbands stay home.

Looking ahead, a top goal continues to be finding additional opportunities to mentor new lawyers. She’s deeply involved with the University of Illinois College of Law, having served as president of the Dean’s Advisory Board and now working as a mentor for law students as they graduate and look for their first jobs out of school.

She feels compelled to positively influence law students because law school was an important juncture for her.

Murray didn’t particularly plan for law school. Rather, she “stumbled on it.” Although she came from a medical family, she hated the sight of blood. So, she secured a business degree from the University of Illinois before following up with law school. She was surprised to find how much she liked it.

“I really, really enjoyed it,” she says. “There were a lot of smart, funny people, and the subject matter was fascinating.”

She also realized she was well made for it. Murray was attracted to three key elements for success in the law: intellectual stimulation, a study of psychology, and a flair for drama.

Coming out of law school, she spent four years at a larger firm and quickly gained experience in intellectual property cases and trial work. She then joined Grippo & Elden, which had only 15 lawyers at the time. Today it has 30.

Michael Chimitris, associate general counsel at steel and mining company ArcelorMittal USA, has known Murray for much of her professional career, both as a peer and as a client. Murray has represented his companies in both major litigation and disputed matters.

“Lynn is unsurpassed in understanding disputes and litigation in the context of the overall business and commercial objectives of

her clients,” he says. “She knows how to get to those objectives creatively, quickly and efficiently. When I have a troubling commercial dispute brewing, I think of Lynn first.”

Managing Her Home Life

When Murray first became pregnant 20 years ago, she and her husband, Dan, planned to continue working. But when word came that she was carrying triplets, they knew something had to give.

“We knew ourselves, and it was obvious we needed a new plan,” she says.

Dan Murray also was a lawyer, but was in a transitional stage in his career as he moved into doing patent work. In the end, they determined that Lynn was happier in her job. So, Dan made the then-unusual decision to be a stay-at-home dad.

In retrospect, they wouldn’t have done it any other way.

That’s not to say those early years were easy. While Dan was comfortable with his decision to stay at home, it was very isolating at first to be the only guy in a community of women. However, he found his stride by the time the twins came along five years later.

For Lynn, balancing work and home meant she didn’t have much time left over for herself when the kids were young.

“When you work and you have young children, it’s a mental and physical challenge,” she says. “You have to structure your life to focus on the kids in the evenings and weekends, and everything else falls by the wayside.”

Despite having a job that can have very demanding travel requirements, Murray tried to avoid many business trips during the babies’ first years.

“Triplets were very hard for one person to handle,” she says. “But there was some travel and there were trials even in those early years.”

She remembers those early days, when her husband would take night duty during the week and she would take it on the weekends. Now, though, the challenges of those first years have faded, and Murray considers enjoying her children a natural pastime.

Her triplets—two girls and a boy—are college juniors. Her twins—a boy and a girl—are turning 15. She likes seeing them take on summer jobs, ranging from mowing lawns and babysitting to restaurant and office work. She’s glad to see that the legacy of finding value in hard work is being passed down to the next generation.

As for herself, there is a little more “me” time in Murray’s world these days. She and her husband have begun to travel more, “doing some of the things we put on hold while we had a family.” They went to Istanbul and Spain in the last couple of years and have plans to visit Costa Rica later this year.

Dan continues to be a stay-at-home dad, and Murray doesn’t wish him back to the office anytime soon. They are happy with the arrangement they’ve had for the past 20 years, one that raised a beautiful family and allowed her career to soar.

“If the parents are happy, the kids will be happy, too,” Murray says. “I think the decision worked very well for us.” ■