

From hidden gold to big business deals,
Linda Parks' work might inspire a few legal thrillers

by MICHELLE TAUTE

photography by CHRISTOPHER CLARK

Adventures in Lawyering



Parks co-founded
the Kansas Women
Attorneys Association
in 1994 and served as
president of the Kansas
Bar Association from
2007 to 2008.

If Linda Parks ever decided to follow John Grisham's career path, she wouldn't have to look any further than her own career for inspiration. Right now the Wichita lawyer is a trustee in a bankruptcy case with as much mystery and intrigue as any page-turner.

The main figure in the case, Gary Krause, filed bankruptcy in 2005, claiming not to have any money, even to pay the millions he owes the IRS in taxes. But so far Parks has discovered more than \$1.2 million. "Part of it is luck," she says. "Some of it is you can smell something that isn't quite right."

During the case, Krause was ordered to disclose all assets, including those in trust for his children, and while looking into accounts at one bank, Parks discovered four safe-deposit boxes. She sent an associate out to meet Krause with the key, and they opened one box filled with gold coins worth \$250,000. The other three contained old coins that Parks believes are worth at least \$100,000.

Parks is the managing partner at Hite, Fanning & Honeyman and spends 40 to 50 percent of her time on bankruptcy work. Her client list includes Fidelity Bank, a large construction company and a variety of other clients, including a business that owns KFC franchises. She focuses much of her other energy on business transactions or "doing deals" as Parks likes to say, though in the current economic climate it might be about saving a deal that's in trouble.

The high-drama Krause case is an ongoing effort. Most of Krause's assets are held in trusts for his children and are supposed to be controlled by his brother Richard. "We put Richard on the stand to testify and it was clear he wasn't acting out his duties as trustee," Parks says. It became obvious that Gary controlled the money, so the judge ordered that the assets in the trusts be included in the bankruptcy case.

In an unusual move in the bankruptcy world, Krause actually spent 10 days in jail, because the judge ordered him to stay there until he paid back \$59,000 that was removed from the assets. Krause is out now after borrowing from friends to repay about half that amount, and he's appealing the decision on the trusts.

There may also be a James Bond sort of twist lurking in the case's future. "In the bankruptcy world, we tend to kind of laugh at people who think there is a Swiss bank account," Parks says. "Everybody thinks there must be a Swiss bank account, that's where my money went, and we think, 'No, they just spent your money.' In this case, we are pretty sure there is a Swiss bank account."

Whether she's looking for hidden accounts or closing a big business deal, Parks clearly thrives in the face of a challenge. She recently worked on a \$6.7 million transaction and she says it was a lot like handling a case that goes to court. "You're focused, you're on, you're stressed," she says. "You think, 'Oh my God, how am I ever going to get this

all to come together?'" Then the deal is done, and you think, 'I did it.'"

In fact, those three little words might be an appropriate mantra for her entire career. Parks has wanted to be a lawyer since watching *Perry Mason* shows as a child. Her mom told her to grow up and be like Della Street, Mason's secretary, but Parks insisted that she wanted to be like Mason. She held onto the idea of being a lawyer right through college, even when an undergraduate adviser suggested she take teaching classes just in case her plans didn't work out.

After finishing her law degree at Washburn University in Topeka, she became the only woman at a previous incarnation of the firm where she works now, and four and a half years later, she became the firm's first female partner and was the only woman partner for 11 years. Today there are six female attorneys, three of whom are partners, among the 22 lawyers at the firm, and Parks deals with many staffing and business issues as the managing partner.

"Our firm is what I would call a democracy," she says. "I always kid that being managing partner in our office means I pick out the Christmas card." But it also includes troubleshooting challenges or remembering that a particular issue was addressed at a meeting two years ago. She also works on the firm's marketing strategy.

THERE'S NO QUESTION that Parks has built a successful career, but she's also spent a substantial amount of time working to improve the profession as a whole. In 1994, she founded the Kansas Women Attorneys Association with six other female lawyers: Lori Callahan, Cathy Reeder, Martha Hodgesmith, Barbara Rankin, Marla Luckert and Carol Beier. The latter two serve on the Kansas Supreme Court.

The idea for the group sprang out of a conference for women attorneys held in Kansas, but for a few years things never progressed beyond the talking stage. Then Parks and a few of her friends said, "Let's go ahead and do this. Let's get this started." They sent out a postcard survey to see if women lawyers felt there was a need for the group, and the result was a resounding yes.

"The Kansas Bar had tried to do its own study a few years before, and came back saying, 'We don't know if there is any discrimination against women. We don't know if there is any issue,'" Parks says. "We said, 'Well, we know.'" They incorporated the group and Parks served as the president for the first couple of years to help the organization gain momentum. The primary goal: Help promote women in the law profession.

This year the group's conference drew 190 attendees, which is especially impressive when you compare the number to the roughly 300 people the Kansas Bar Association conference attracts. Parks chaired the KWAA 2009 event, and the confer-

ence even featured columnist Ellen Goodman as a speaker. But the association's real value comes from the connections made among the women and how those ties further their careers.

Parks believes the organization played a big role in electing the first woman in Kansas to chair the commission that chooses the state's appellate judges. It was a big victory since the position was previously dominated by older white men. "It's because we had that organization that we were able to organize and raise money," she says.

Working with the KWAA also helped Parks become the president of the Kansas Bar Association, a role she held in 2007-2008. She'd already served on the board for several years and as the delegate to the American Bar Association. Eventually, the nominating committee asked her to run for vice president and later she moved up to president-elect, then president. She was the fifth woman to earn that title.

To her co-workers, none of this comes as a big surprise. "She's the kind of person who, if she's in an organization for a day, someone wants her to run it," says Scott Hill, an associate. "It's just her personality. She's a natural leader." Dick Hite, a senior partner, remembers when Parks was hired more than 20 years ago. "We always knew that she had a lot of talent and potential," he says. "But in the '80s, whether or not a woman would become a president of the bar association was not known."

These days Parks is turning her focus toward a new goal: She wants to help women gain equal ranks among her county's judges. As of the last election, there were no women holding those seats, so Parks would like to explore the formation of a commission to select judges based on merit, one similar to the system used by the appellate court.

But Parks' drive doesn't mean she's all work and no play. Her friends or husband might tell you about her love of all things pink, or that she's an avid Barbie collector. There are about 40 or 50 of the iconic dolls in her home, and they're all on display. "Every time a little girl comes over we say, 'You need to see the Barbie room,'" she says. The collection started about 15 years ago and includes dolls that Parks played with when she was young, along with more contemporary dolls loved for their dresses or retro looks.

She also spends her time outside the office giving back to the community. Right now Parks is president-elect of the local YWCA board, and she's helping the group raise money to support its domestic-abuse shelter.

Closer to home, she's a cat lover with three felines of her own and a soft spot for strays. She's rescued several feral cats and found them homes. One of her orphans was a Siamese kitten she found under a highway overpass.

By all accounts, Parks seems to be living a life with a plot as rich as any *Perry Mason* episode and enjoying a career that's perhaps even better. ◀