

# KATE CONWAY

## Blazing Her Trail in PI Law, Women's Bar, Community

by Jordyn Reiland

When Kathryn L. Conway was an undergraduate student at the University of Illinois, she majored in political science and psychology.

Conway was intrigued by the study of people and, after a clinical psychology practicum, she was interested in the possibility of treating patients. Conway applied for a clinical psychology Ph.D. program at Loyola University Chicago after graduating from the University of Illinois in 2006.

Although she was accepted, she never started the program. Instead, she applied to law school at Loyola University Chicago School of Law. The decision was not necessarily an easy one, she recalls.

Conway saw her father, Kevin J. Conway, a partner at Cooney & Conway, enjoy continued success as a lawyer while she was growing up. But she wasn't looking to follow in his footsteps.

She was intent on "blazing her own trail" and doing what she could to make a name for herself.

"I had this innate need to be independent," Conway explains.

But after spending some time on a judge's political campaign, working for then-presidential candidate Barack Obama's campaign, and then clerking at Corboy & Demetrio for two years, she was eventually convinced the legal field was where she was supposed to be.

While in her second year at Loyola University Chicago School of Law, Conway was given the opportunity to work as a law clerk at Power Rogers.

After earning her law degree in 2011, Conway was hired on as an associate at the law firm and has worked there ever since.

"I hope I never have to leave," Conway says. "Right from day one, I was given a ton of responsibility. The attorneys at our office are so skilled, and they handle such interesting, complex cases, it really made me want to practice this type of law."

Conway, now 35, says the reason she enjoys doing what she does every day is her willingness to "go the extra distance," especially in a trial setting.

"I wish every day was a trial. I find them



exhilarating and rewarding," she says.

And according to her colleague, Joseph W. Balesteri of Power Rogers, she is a very good trial lawyer. Conway has worked on and tried several cases alongside various partners at the firm, including founding partner Joseph A. Power, Jr., in addition to a handful of solo trials.

"The biggest compliment you can pay to a lawyer at a firm that has significant cases that get tried is the number of times the lawyer gets asked to try a case," Balesteri says. "Partners ask her to try cases and give her major roles in the trial a lot of the time. That means she is a really, really, really good lawyer."

"She is a truly special person who we were lucky to hire," he says.

Retired Cook County Circuit Court Judge Kay M. Hanlon, who presided over two of Conway's jury trials, expressed similar sentiments.

Hanlon says Conway has the ability to intelligently and calmly argue motions but also, when speaking to jurors, break everything down into common sense language.

"The first word that comes to me is extraordinary," Hanlon says. "She has the perfect balance: She has the presence, the demeanor, the integrity, and that translates very well with judges and a jury."

### ALWAYS AN ADVOCATE

Conway has always considered herself "a bit of an advocate." As early on as law school, Conway showed her interest in trial work and in being a voice for others. She earned a certificate in advocacy from Loyola in addition to her law degree.

Now, as an attorney, she is very much aware of what her role on a case can mean to her clients.

"Folks come to us after suffering some kind of devastating occurrence," Conway



says. "Being able to do something that is really concrete and to be able to help them is incredibly rewarding."

Conway handles a variety of personal injury and wrongful death cases including medical malpractice, automotive accidents, trucking negligence, premises liability and product liability.

Between January 2017 and March 2018, Conway tried three medical malpractice cases—one alongside Larry R. Rogers, Jr. and another alongside Thomas G. Siracusa. Each resulted in multimillion-dollar awards for her clients.

One case that stands out in Conway's mind concerned the family of Hermelinda Toro, a 55-year-old woman who died nearly a month after she suffered complications related to a May 2013 pacemaker insertion surgery.

Following her procedure, Toro experienced post-surgical bleeding and remained an inpatient nearly one month after the procedure was complete. Toro returned to the hospital four days after she was released complaining of shortness of breath.

She died the next morning as a result of pneumonia and hypovolemic shock.

Conway argued in a lawsuit against the hospital that a surgical evacuation or blood transfusion should have been done once she was readmitted to the hospital because the shortness of breath was being caused by a continuation of the post-surgical bleed.

Through discovery, Conway determined the electronic medical records showed changes had been made to Toro's medical records after the lawsuit was filed when Toro was already deceased.

After Conway uncovered these changes, the defense attorneys representing the hospital approached her about mediating the case. The case ultimately settled for more than \$6.4 million.

"What that taught me was don't settle for any answers at face value. You always have to dig deeper and make sure you are getting an honest answer," she says.

#### DO YOUR HOMEWORK

One of the keys to trial success, according to Conway, is "leaving no stone unturned."

"It's imperative that you know the file better than anyone else," Conway says. "I read and re-read depositions. I do a lot of research on any biases experts may have and any contrary opinions they have given in other cases."

And even when Conway is not working on a case from the beginning, "she knows everything about it," according to Courtney E. Lindbert of Cunningham Meyer & Vedrine PC.

"She really digs into a case," Lindbert says. "I had a case with someone else at her office. But she had to step in and take depositions. And even though she was stepping in, she

knew as much as the primary attorneys did."

Balesteri says Conway's abilities to dig deep and work hard are just a few ways his colleague finds success on cases.

"Work ethic is clearly a major asset for Kate," he says. "Ever since I have known her, she is the first person in the firm to arrive in the morning."

Despite her hard work and effort, Conway recognizes that not every case is going to go your way. Despite that truth, she believes it is incredibly important to learn from every situation.

"You should want to succeed, but for young lawyers in particular, the best thing they can possibly do is take every trial as a learning experience," she says.

"You should also not overlook any opportunity—meaning you can learn from the judge, co-counsel, defense counsel and

even the jurors."

Conway says some of the most valuable lessons she has learned in her last few cases have come from speaking to the jurors directly following a verdict.

"I sat down with different jurors and asked about all aspects of the case. Some feedback reinforced what I was doing, and some of it was constructive feedback I will take with me going forward," Conway says.

"That is something everyone should take advantage of, and it can be very worthwhile," she adds.

#### WOMEN IN LAW

As a woman in the legal field, Conway believes opportunity is the biggest way women will gain equality.

"I have been lucky that, where I work, I have been given a ton of opportunity," she



Conway with husband Conor Hunt of Marshall Gerstein & Borun and son Elliot



Conway and Pam Pantages (right) with their client Afolake Lawoyin soon after a successful jury verdict



says. "That is not the story that most women have. Most women feel, and rightfully so, that they were not extended the same opportunities as their male counterparts."

While there have been times Conway has been confused with the court reporter, she believes some progress is being made.

"I usually see at least one other female attorney in the room with me during a deposition, and attorneys who came before me could not say that."

Conway is the first vice-president of the Women's Bar Association of Illinois, an organization she has been involved in for a number of years.

Thinking about future generations of female attorneys, Conway says it's incredibly important to think not just about yourself but also about those who will walk in your footsteps down the road.

"Change isn't going to come if we shy away from an uncomfortable situation," she says. "Doing stuff for you is important, but it is also crucial to help others who will come after you."

Lindbert, who is also a member of the WBAI, says Conway "helped shepherd (her) into the organization."

Now, after knowing Conway for about eight years, Lindbert says Conway continues to go out of her way to help create opportunities for her.

"She will always think of me if they need another speaker, and it has done great things for my career," Lindbert says. "That sets her apart and makes her really special."

Conway is scheduled to be president of the Women's Bar Association of Illinois this year. One thing she hopes to do with the group of "young and vibrant lawyers" is become more politically active as the group has been in years past.

For example, she appreciated the organization's effort in Illinois' ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment, and she hopes to do similar things when her term comes.

"I want to draw from the group's collective wisdom and pursue things that are reflective of the identity of this organization," she says.

In addition to the WBAI, Conway serves on the associate boards of Chicago Jesuit Academy, a non-profit middle school on the West Side, and Sarah's Inn, a non-profit dedicated to providing resources to and improving the lives of those affected by domestic violence.

Hanlon says Conway's involvement in organizations outside of her day job makes her well-rounded, something that is often hard to find in the legal profession.

"She just really gives back to the community, and I think that is really important," says Hanlon.



A cake Conway made that was featured on Martha Stewart's social media

#### LIKE FATHER, LIKE DAUGHTER

Not only is Conway practicing law in Chicago like her father, but she has even had an opportunity to work alongside him on a case. It was an experience she won't soon forget.

"Most people would not have that opportunity at all," she says. "It was pretty great to be able to watch and learn. And I did, I learned a ton."

She has also had chances to watch her father from the sidelines.

**"I love to cook. I find it to be a nice stress release. I am pretty lucky that my husband Conor is into food as well."**

While Kevin Conway may not have outwardly said it, Kate Conway says her father really wanted her to be a lawyer.

Instead of mentioning the possibility of her being a lawyer directly, he would sometimes recommend the career path when she expressed interest in other professions. "I think he's absolutely thrilled," she says.

#### ON A PERSONAL NOTE

When Conway is not working at her 70 W. Madison St. office, you can often find

her cooking with her family or trying new restaurants.

"I love to cook. I find it to be a nice stress release," Conway says. "I like the process of creating something, and I am pretty lucky that my husband Conor is into food as well."

In addition to her love of being in the kitchen, Conway started a food blog about three years ago called, 'The Ginger List.' She shares recipes and resources for fellow foodies there.

It all started with an Instagram account she created to catalog recipes she found. Suddenly, people became interested in what she was doing. Then, as her popularity grew, she started getting invitations from various food vendors and brands to test out products.

Between passing the bar exam and starting at Power Rogers, Conway went to an Italian cooking school where, for 10 days in real kitchens, she learned how to make pasta from scratch and other Italian delicacies.

Conway also enjoys cooking and eating Middle Eastern cuisine and spicy foods.

She lives in west suburban River Forest with her husband Conor Hunt, who is a patent attorney, newborn son Elliot, and two rescue dogs. The couple bought the oldest house in the town and have worked to renovate it.

"We understand how demanding our careers are, but we make time to do fun stuff, too," Conway says. ■