

SUMMERS AT THE COURTHOUSE BROUGHT KEELY DUKE TO THE LAW

Susie Boring-Headlee

ADR/Pro Bono Coordinator U.S. District Court

Keely Duke's personal values and hard work were seeds planted during childhood. Keely grew up in Missoula, Montana and spent her summers under the watchful eye of her Grandma Helen. Grandma Helen taught Keely that as a woman, Keely could do and be anything she set her mind to. As an avid "people watcher," Grandma Helen would take young Keely on day trips to many places in Missoula, including the airport and the Missoula County Courthouse to watch courtroom dramas unfold.

Those trips had a profound impact on Keely. She watched as what her grandmother called "everyday folk" went into the courthouse to have disputes decided by their neighbors; something Grandma Helen explained was a special and important part of this great country. Keely learned about attorneys and judges, and the important role they play in the judicial process and how the attorneys assisted those in need through stressful times.

Those summers with Grandma Helen formed what would be life-changing decisions for Keely. As a result, and at a young age, Keely set her mind on law school. To continue learning as much as she could about the law, each summer while Keely was in college she worked as a runner for an insurance defense law firm in Missoula. She enjoyed the law, and deeply respected the attorneys in the firm where she worked.

That interest in the defense never subsided and after completing law school in Oregon, Keely moved to Boise to join Hall, Farley, Oberrecht & Blanton. Twelve years later, she has defended hundreds of clients, handled numerous jury trials, and is respected as a defense attorney across Idaho.

Keely's first venture into the federal court pro bono world involved her representing an African American woman in an employment lawsuit against the woman's employer. When Keely was asked to accept this appointment, she did not hesitate and when reading the complaint, quickly realized that most plaintiff attorneys would not consider it an economically feasible case because the damages were limited. However, to the pro se client, a middle-aged homeless woman living in a shelter, this was her life. Keely was impressed with the caliber of her client who was an "absolute pleasure" to work with, as she was articulate, appreciative, and had reasonable expectations.

The case moved into mediation with U.S. Magistrate Judge Larry M. Boyle who Keely said treated her client with the utmost dignity and respect. Ultimately, a settlement was reached for her client who was extremely grateful and Keely provided the name of a reputable financial planner to help her client manage her money.

This experience for Keely was very rewarding and she plans to continue this service throughout her legal career. As for Grandma Helen, she is also now teaching Keely's 8 year old twin daughters, Abby and Elizabeth, that they can be anything they want to be. In addition, this October, as she celebrates her 90th birthday, Grandma Helen can be sure that those courthouse trips made a lasting impression on her granddaughter.



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Keely Duke's pro bono work helped an African American woman assert her rights in an employment discrimination dispute. Ms. Duke was inspired to help people from all walks of life by her "Grandma Helen," pictured below.



About the Author

Susie Boring-Headlee currently serves as the Federal Pro Bono Coordinator and ADR Coordinator. She spent 10 years at the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals, where she completed a two-year capital case management plan for Judge Arthur Alarcón. She is married to Paul Headlee, and they enjoy gardening, hiking with their yellow lab Benelli, and riding their Harley Davidson.

Editor's Note

In an effort to increase awareness of pro bono work provided by Idaho attorneys, *The Advocate* will regularly spotlight individuals and their cases. If you would like to take a pro bono assignment that meets your time constraints and interests, contact Idaho Volunteer Lawyers program at (208) 334-4500, or the Federal Court Pro Bono Program at (208) 334-9067.