



Karen L. Hart

Partner | Bell Nunnally & Martin

In college, Karen Hart's mentors recognized how much she enjoyed speaking and writing and steered her toward the law.

Early in her career after law school, Hart had the opportunity to work on a pro bono case, representing an HIV-positive African woman seeking asylum in the United States.

Her "crime" was having AIDS, acquired as a result of a sexual assault, says Hart, now 37 and a partner at Bell Nunnally & Martin LLP in Dallas. The woman was ostracized, beaten and abused in her home country. Her asylum application was granted.

"Although I do not currently practice immigration law, I still look back on that experience and draw from it," Hart says. "What I do as a lawyer is about helping people — in their businesses and in their lives."

Where I was born: El Paso.

My family: My great-grandmother (dad's side) was from Chihuahua, Mexico, and married a redheaded Irishman who came to West Texas working on the railroad. My grandfather (mom's side), originally from Hungary, served in the Air Force and retired at Fort Bliss. My parents did not go to college, and I am the first in my family to have a professional degree and certainly the first lawyer in the family. In keeping with our multicultural family tradition, I married a nice Jewish boy.

Growing up: I was so lucky to grow up on the border. I was able to take advantage of two cultures that merged into one in El Paso. I was around Spanish speakers daily, traversed the dangers of Juarez nightlife (much safer back then), and most of my friends were of Mexican descent.

A significant experience that shaped my future: Right out of law school, I served as a law clerk to a federal district court judge, the Honorable Hayden Head Jr. Judge was tough, and he taught me a great deal about the law — lessons that I still draw upon today. I learned from the attorneys who appeared before the court, good and bad. I learned the importance of credibility and integrity in legal writing and

arguments and in life.

Education: University of Texas at El Paso, B.A., 1997, with highest honors; University of Texas at Austin School of Law, J.D., 2001, with honors.

My first "real" job: Early in my career, I had the opportunity to represent an HIV-positive African woman seeking asylum in the United States pro bono. Her "crime" was having AIDS, acquired as a result of a sexual assault. She was ostracized, beaten and abused in her home country. Thankfully, her asylum application was granted. Although I do not currently practice immigration law, I still look back on that experience and draw from it. What I do as a lawyer is about helping people — in their businesses and in their lives.

How I got into law: My mentors in college steered me to the law, which was a natural choice based on how much I enjoyed speaking and writing.

How I got where I am: I am partner at Bell Nunnally. Getting to this level has taken absolute dedication to every case, every detail, every client, every time.

My greatest challenge: My dad passed away from lupus when I was in college. He was 52. I was 20.

How I overcame: My dad's passing made me realize that life is short. You have to go for it in life and enjoy every minute. Living life and moving forward is the only way to overcome a loss like this.

The secret to my success: My passion for my work.

How I give back: I serve as president of the Board of Directors of Texas Winds Musical Outreach Inc. I have also been appointed by the Department of Commerce as a member of the North Texas District Export Council, of which I serve as vice chair. I am active in Commercial Real Estate Women Dallas, for which I co-chair the Member Services Committee.

Why I do it: It takes a village. And it is fun and rewarding.

How I mentor others: It is important to reach behind you and bring up the next generation



JAKE DEAN

Bell Nunnally & Martin LLP

INDUSTRY: Legal

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LOCAL ADDRESS: 3232 McKinney Ave., Ste. 1400, Dallas 75204

TOP EXECUTIVE: Jim Skochdopole, managing partner

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— especially women. I mentor women associate attorneys at my firm through our women's initiative.

My goals for the future: Continuing to win cases and kicking butt. Continuing to expand my practice in business litigation, real estate and international law. And continuing to positively impact the Dallas community.

What I'm most known for: I am a legal plumber. I fix problems and help my clients avoid trouble. I find solutions to difficult business and legal dilemmas.

Something others would be surprised to know: I played mariachi music and converted to Judaism, in that order.