

# Seven Questions

A Tribute to Judge Kristy Martinez:  
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BY MARIA E. BERKENKOTTER

It has been an honor to introduce readers of this column to new judges from all over Colorado. I have especially enjoyed seeing the themes that flow through some of the judges' answers in these interviews. Many judges have described their love and appreciation for their family and friends. A number have demonstrated an openness to discussing difficult personal challenges—sometimes even tragedies. Many have also mentioned the demands that come with this work, while at the same time expressing a deep appreciation of the importance, gravity, and meaning of the work we are fortunate enough to get to do. Interestingly, we also have a lot of judges who are die-hard Broncos fans who readily admit to yelling at their TVs.

It's been fascinating, as well, to learn about some of the varied interests of our judges outside their courthouses. I loved learning about the judge who raises dairy goats (and who still shows me baby goat pictures when I am lucky enough to see her), the judge who plays ice hockey in an over-35 league, the judge who maintains a mindfulness practice, the judge who teaches and dances at an Indian dance studio, and the judge whose bucket list includes running a marathon in Antarctica, to name just a few. The walk-up songs have been pretty interesting too. Guns N' Roses? The Chicago Bulls theme song? Who knew!

In this column, I take a somewhat different path so I can introduce you to Kristy Martinez, a judge who touched the lives of almost everyone she encountered, including mine, and whom we sadly lost to cancer last year. I am deeply grateful to three of Kristy's colleagues from the 20th Judicial District—Judge J.P. Martin, Chief Judge Ingrid Bakke, and Judge Liz Brodsky—who shared with me a few of their memories of Kristy

and the impact she had on their lives and those in the legal community and beyond. While reflecting on Kristy's life is, in many ways, a joyful experience, it can be a deeply sad one as well.

You will see certain themes that run through these interviews. I intentionally did not edit these out because they speak so powerfully to who Kristy was, as a judge and as a person. I appreciate Judges Martin, Bakke, and Brodsky for sharing with me—and you—some of their joy and a little bit of their sadness, and for their willingness to shine a light on some of the things that made Kristy such an extraordinary human.

You would have liked her a lot.

## Judge J.P. Martin

### *What was Judge Martinez most proud of in her personal life?*

Without question, Kristy was most proud of her daughter, Bella. Kristy was proud of Bella's strong independent spirit and her character. Kristy spoke of Bella often and with overflowing enthusiasm. I won't get into too many details here, out of respect for Bella's privacy, but Kristy's face and eyes shined the brightest when she spoke of her daughter.

### *What do you most admire about her?*

It's hard to pick the thing I most admire, but here is one thing: Kristy had the unfailing ability to see people's greatest potential and then to inspire them to act on that potential. Kristy seemed to know everyone's personal, even private, aspirations or dreams—people felt comfortable sharing deeply with her. (And if someone didn't share with her, Kristy would somehow just intuit their aspirations.) Kristy would fuel those aspirations with encouragement as well as practical support. She was your best

cheerleader and your mentor, whether you knew it or not.

### *What did/would she want new judges to know?*

I know what she would say because we talked quite a bit about her own experiences as a new judge. Kristy would tell new judges this: You have just been given a sacred responsibility that will challenge you in many ways, some of which you would not have anticipated. You can do this, and you will be great. You are not alone; reach out for support; everyone wants to help you. Work very hard, treat every single person with dignity, be humble and patient, and make decisions with grace. Cherish your time on the bench because you will, sooner or later, pass your seat—and your sacred responsibility—to someone else.

### *Name one thing about Judge Martinez that would surprise people.*

She could split an apple with a bow and arrow if she needed to.

### *What was Judge Martinez's superpower?*

Her gratitude. She embodied that spirit. She never missed an opportunity to express her sincere gratitude to everyone. Before she passed, we spoke a lot about gratitude. She told me that her initial diagnosis, two decades earlier, was a gift—*she called cancer a gift*. It shaped most of her adult life; it made her stronger and remarkably resilient. It stripped away chaff; it disabused her of the false promise of “next year” or even “tomorrow” and allowed her to relish her every “today.” Her gratitude never faltered, even during her most trying times.

### *What did/would she want new county court attorneys to know?*

She would say: You can do this. It's normal to feel overwhelmed. What you are doing is deeply important. It is a profession and a calling. Treat it as such, and you will be rewarded more than you imagine.

### *Did knowing her change you? How?*

Yes, knowing Kristy changed my life profoundly. Kristy introduced me to my wife, she officiated our wedding ceremony, and she was my older

son's godmother. I don't think there is another person, outside my family, who has shaped my life more directly and deeply than Kristy. Beyond these tangible impacts, Kristy set the standard for what it means to live with gratitude, resilience, and passion. I think of her, with gratitude and inspiration, daily.

***Please share a favorite memory you have of Judge Martinez.***

During one of her first jail dockets as a new judge, Kristy was giving a surly in-custody defendant his Rule 5 advisement. The defendant cut her off and blurted out, "I'm not worried about my constitutional rights!" Kristy, without missing a beat, smiled, and in her upbeat, singsongy way, said: "Oh, that's okay! I'll worry about them for both of us!" And she did, for that defendant, and for every defendant who ever appeared before her.

**Chief Judge Ingrid Bakke**

***What was Judge Martinez's most endearing/annoying habit?***

Well, this is a fun one to answer because to some, one of her most endearing habits, thanking people, was one of her most annoying habits. Yes, hard to believe one criticism that she received during her performance review was that she spent too much time thanking people during court. The reality is that this is one of her most endearing habits that exhibited one of her most endearing characteristics—she was an incredibly gracious person to everyone who appeared in front of her. But even beyond her courtroom, when she was in hospice care and in tremendous pain, I would always hear her say, "thank you, momma" or "thanks, Bella, I love you" when they would bring her ice, help her with a drink of water, or just ask if she needed anything. It was a beautiful thing to witness. We should all aspire to be so kind and gracious in and out of our courtrooms.

***What made Judge Martinez a good judge and a good person?***

Kristy never tried to be anyone but Kristy Martinez both on and off the bench. And to be Kristy Martinez meant to be a great daughter and friend to her mother, the best mom she could be for her daughter, a colleague who had your



Judge Martinez in office.

back, a friend who would be there for you and could *always* make you laugh, and a judge who had no "black robe" ego and who genuinely worked every day to do what was right. I would be remiss not to mention she was a really good dog mom to Snoopy and Luna.

***Name one thing about Judge Martinez that would surprise people.***

She was terrified to drive in the snow, regardless of whether it was an inch or foot of snow. It was quite funny because she would ask for a ride to work when there was snow on the ground but not even on the roads.

***What was Judge Martinez most proud of in her personal life?***

I am going to guess that anyone who knows Kristy would answer this the same—her daughter Bella. Kristy loved nothing more than being a mom and she glowed with pride when she would talk about her. Bella is truly her mother's daughter. An example of this is Kristy and Bella were on a walk together and Bella accidentally stepped on a caterpillar and killed it. She felt horrible. When they returned home, they got on the web and found a caterpillar rescue on the East Coast and donated money to the nonprofit.

***What were Judge Martinez's favorite foods?***

Authentic pad thai, mom's prime rib, and Mustard's Last Stand hotdogs, to be eaten with her favorite music: good old rock and roll like Styx and Journey.

***Please share a favorite memory you have of Judge Martinez.***

Kristy had a small dog at one point in her life. She was living in a somewhat rural area, and a coyote had coaxed the dog off of her property and then attacked it. Kristy ran after the coyote and was not going to let that coyote have her dog. She was able to intimidate the coyote enough to drop her dog. Although the dog did not survive, it died in her arms instead of in the mouth of the coyote. She could be so fierce and loyal.

***What is a favorite quote of hers?***

A quote that resonated with Kristy and she insisted be read at her Celebration of Life is from Marianne Williamson. "Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness, that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous? Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of God. Your playing small doesn't serve the world." If Ms. Williamson had not come up with this, Kristy would have. Kristy lived to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, and fabulous and expected the same from us. She never played small.

**Judge Elizabeth Brodsky*****What makes you think about Judge Martinez?***

I think the better question is what doesn't make me think about Judge Martinez. Kristy is always in my heart and so very often in my thoughts. I hear her giggle and feel her warm embrace when I walk past her office, I feel her magic when I see a fox, I hear her brilliant guidance when I grapple with a legal issue, and I think of her whenever I am hiking in our beautiful mountains.

***What did/would she want new county court attorneys to know?***

Judge Martinez was a fierce and loyal advocate for all of those who shared her love of the law. She encouraged a generation of attorneys to pursue their passions, to strive for excellence, and to give the world their unique and authentic selves. She would want attorneys to know that the law is a noble calling, that she is proud of them for accepting the call, and that she applauds their pursuit of fairness and justice.

***Are there ways in which Judge Martinez lives on?***

Judge Martinez continues to live on in both concrete and intangible ways. She lives on in her extraordinary mother Sally, her beloved daughter Bella, her colleagues, and all who had the great privilege of knowing her. Each of us was touched by her magic and carry her magic with us in our own special way.

Her concrete contributions to the legal profession live on in the flourishing Korey Wise Innocence Project; in the passion-fueled advocacy of those she mentored; and in the shifting of the arc of justice toward fairness, equality, and compassion.

***What is something that Judge Martinez taught you that has stayed with you ever since?***

Judge Martinez taught me so very much. One of the most important lessons is to give each day my all, to live with gratitude and to be my authentic self.

***What's a funny story about Judge Martinez that you will never forget?***

There are so many stories that I carry with me and that light my days. Kristy and I hiked almost every noon hour. One particularly hot day, we were heading back to the Justice Center from our walk and saw that the sprinklers were on across the street. We made eye contact and, without a word spoken, we both ran across the street and danced in the sprinklers. We returned to court refreshed, a bit waterlogged, and ready to embrace our afternoon dockets.

***Please share a favorite memory you have of Judge Martinez.***

[A little backstory: Judge Martinez loved hot dogs and shared her love of hot dogs with her County Court Family. Kristy created the tradition of County Court Hot Dog Parties.]

One of my favorite memories I have of Judge Martinez was her Hospice Hot Dog Party. One day I was visiting her while she was in hospice. We were laughing and crying, and then we started reminiscing about our County Court Hot Dog Parties. In that moment, the idea for her Hospice Hot Dog Party was born, and it was celebrated the following week. The party

was attended by so many members of the legal community far and wide, as well as friends and family. Kristy was presented with a flag flown over the Capitol in her honor and we dedicated her courtroom to her.

Kristy was a force of nature. She was exquisitely beautiful on both the inside and the outside—charming, charismatic, brilliant, and so very authentic. But she often did not realize what a remarkable human being she was. At her Hospice Hot Dog Party, she felt seen—and she saw her beauty and magic and her impact on us all. I shall forever cherish that moment and that memory.

***What did/would she want new judges to know?***

That we are all united by our shared commitment to the communities we serve and that we are at our best when we raise one another up. Judge Martinez supported her colleagues locally and across the state with unbridled enthusiasm and brilliance.

***If she wasn't a judge, what do you think she would have been?***

Kristy and I often dreamed of retiring and refurbishing homes together. She watched endless television programs regarding home refurbishment and was well-informed and experienced on the subject. Kristy designed and remodeled the basement of her home for her beloved daughter Bella and was fearless in her acceptance of any and all projects.

If she wasn't a judge, she could have been a star of a home refurbishing program—but she could have been so many things, as she was endlessly talented, bright, and ambitious. As it turns out, Kristy was just who the world needed—a fierce advocate for the most vulnerable among us, a judge who was loyal to the law and those she served, and a devoted mother, daughter, sister, and friend. CL



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