

*The Path and The Practice - Katie Harrington
Transcription*

Alexis Robertson:

Welcome to The Path & The Practice, a podcast dedicated to sharing the professional origin stories of the attorneys at Foley & Lardner LLP, a full service law firm with over 1,000 lawyers across the US and abroad. I'm your host, Alexis Robertson, Director of Diversity and Inclusion at Foley. In each episode of this podcast, you'll hear me in conversation with a different Foley attorney. You'll learn about each guest's unique background, path to law school and path to Foley & Lardner. Essentially, you'll hear the stories you won't find on their professional bios. And of course, you'll learn a bit about their practice. Now, let's get to the episode.

Alexis Robertson:

Today, I'm speaking with Katie Harrington. Katie's a litigation associate who up until recently had spent the entirety of her career in the firm's Houston office. Not only do we cover the reason for Katie's recent move to Boston, but we spend some time talking about Texas, which definitely took this mid-westerer out of her comfort zone. Katie also shares about how she attended college with an eye towards getting a PR marketing job for a professional sports team, but instead she went to law school. In addition to this, Katie shares what it was like navigating college, law school and her early career as a member of the LGBTQ community and how when she started to practice at a firm, she decided that she wasn't going to hide who she was.

Alexis Robertson:

I can't possibly summarize everything that Katie and I touch on, but I will say that we did bond a bit over just how disorienting it is to start law school when you don't know anything about the law. And Katie gives some wonderful advice about just how important it is to like and truly enjoy the people that you work with. I hope you enjoy our conversation.

Alexis Robertson:

Hi, Katie. Welcome to the show.

Katie Harrington:

Hey. Thank you.

Alexis Robertson:

As you know, well, with every guest, sorry, I say the same thing. I'm always excited to have everyone here, especially you, Katie, today because I've been trying to pin you down for a while, so psyched to have you here. But I'm going to have you start like everyone else. Could you give me your professional introduction?

Katie Harrington:

Yes. So I'm a six year associate of Foley & Lardner. I spent the past five years in the Houston office, but I recently moved to the Boston office. I'm in the litigation group, which primarily involves energy litigation, for me.

Alexis Robertson:

All right. So we're going to talk all about that work stuff in a bit, but I want to go back to the beginning. Where are you from?

Katie Harrington:

I am born and raised in Houston, Texas and I have lived there my entire life, except for the past five weeks.

Alexis Robertson:

Okay. So tell me more. What was childhood like? Do you have siblings? Just tell me more about Katie growing up in Houston.

Katie Harrington:

Yeah. So I'm super close with my family. I have a younger sister. She is just a year and a half younger than me. I absolutely love living in Houston. If you ask anyone, I'm the city's biggest ambassador. I'm obsessed with it. I love the people there. It has an amazing food scene. But yeah, I'm super close with my family. They actually helped me move to Boston and they actually stayed up here for six weeks because they didn't want to go home and it was the first time I've ever left, so they were pretty sad about it.

Alexis Robertson:

All right. I guess, I promise everybody, we will talk about why she's in Boston, but we're not there yet. Because I'm sure everybody wants to know why the [Houstonite 00:03:20], Houstonian ... What is it? Houstonian, [crosstalk 00:03:22] is that right?

Katie Harrington:

Yeah, Houstonian.

Alexis Robertson:

Why the Houstonian has left. But when you were a little girl, you're growing up, was law what you knew you wanted to do?

Katie Harrington:

I can't say that. It was not what I knew I wanted to do. I definitely wasn't the type of person that my whole upbringing I said I was going to be a lawyer. But I will say-

Alexis Robertson:

That was me, by the way. I was that type of person.

Katie Harrington:

Yeah? Awesome. I wish I was.

Alexis Robertson:

But I hear other people weren't, so go on.

Katie Harrington:

I always think about growing up in elementary school and holding a sign that says what you want to do and I think mine probably changed every single year of my life, anywhere from actress, to professional sports player. But yeah, those didn't pan out for me. But yeah, it's definitely not something I knew I wanted to do until college, but it is something where I feel like people were always telling me that I should be a lawyer. No specific reasons, except I was thinking about this the other day when ... Just thinking about this question. And when I was five years old, I would refuse to wear dresses and it really upset my mother, because she would spend so much money on dresses. And then we actually entered into a contract when I was five or six and it said, "I will wear whatever my mom buys for me, as long as it is not a dress and it doesn't have ruffles, flowers, or pink on it." And so, that was at a pretty young age, where I feel like my negotiating skills-

Alexis Robertson:

Did you draft that contract for her?

Katie Harrington:

I know it was handwritten. I can picture it in my head. And so, I feel like I might've been the drafter and I'm sure I left out a lot of really important language. And how enforceable it was, I'm not sure.

Alexis Robertson:

I have to ask a little bit more about it. Did your mom abide by it? Did she then buy you stuff that wasn't dresses [crosstalk 00:05:12] with no flowers ... And then you wore it?

Katie Harrington:

Yeah. She did abide by the contract, but I feel like she definitely pushed the limits and would try and get animal print and things that were not necessarily covered by the spirit of the agreement, but clearly that would also [crosstalk 00:05:29]-

Alexis Robertson:
Polka dots.

Katie Harrington:
Yeah.

Alexis Robertson:
Polka dots were not on there.

Katie Harrington:
Oh, she definitely bought a lot of polka dot stuff, but no dresses, so we finished that.

Alexis Robertson:
That's awesome. I also want to know a little bit about the sports thing. You mentioned that for a while maybe you were ... What sport? What's your sport?

Katie Harrington:
Well, until 9th grade, I played softball. And then when I got to high school I realized I wasn't that good at it. And so, then I moved on to lacrosse and I actually became obsessed with lacrosse in high school. I traveled every summer to go play in various states and was really into that. And I tried to play a little bit in college, but doing club lacrosse was just way too much on my schedule, unfortunately.

Alexis Robertson:
I'd like to ask about that, because I think once we start working in the office, we never see each other, or frequently we don't see that side of the person. So you'll find out that somebody was really great at ... Whether it be a sport, or a hobby. So I just love getting that out of people. So how was it in high school? You're heading to college. What was the thought? What did you think you wanted to do then?

Katie Harrington:
So at that time, I really wanted to go work for a professional sports team after college and I really wanted to do marketing and PR. And at the time, when I was 18, I wanted to get out of Texas. And so, I looked at all of these colleges all across the southeastern conference and I got

into Auburn and I was like, "Awesome. I'm going to go to Auburn." And I loved it. It was cool. Everyone was so nice. And so, I actually sent in my acceptance letter saying, "I'm going to Auburn." And then as months go through, that senior year of high school, I see all of my friends saying they're staying in Texas. And then I just kind of start getting, I guess, an early advance of homesick. And then I think, "I want to go to a school in Texas. I can't leave." And so, I end up going to Texas A&M, which is pretty funny because it's an extremely conservative school. And if you know me, it's just not somewhere you could see me at, but I actually love Texas A&M and I'm a very proud Aggie.

Alexis Robertson:

And where is Texas A&M? How big is it? Tell me more about the school. Then I want to know more about you and why that's funny. So let's keep going.

Katie Harrington:

Yeah. So it is a huge school. I assume the student population is somewhere above 60,000 people at this point. It's an hour and a half outside of Houston in a small town called College Station, Texas, which is pretty much just a college town.

Alexis Robertson:

And that's the name, College Station, because it's a college town.

Katie Harrington:

Yeah, exactly.

Alexis Robertson:

Okay. Well, and so I'm learning ... By the way, I don't know a lot about Texas. I actually had never visited Texas until a few years ago where I went to both ... I think I went to Houston, Austin and Dallas all within a two month period. Some for work, some was personal. And I've since been I think to Houston a few times, but certainly not explored it.

Katie Harrington:

Which one was your favorite though?

Alexis Robertson:

Oo, I don't know if it's fair. I will say my impression ... Gosh, this feels a little controversial. But I don't think Austin is really representative. Austin reminded me of Ann Arbor.

Katie Harrington:

Wow.

Alexis Robertson:
For whatever reason.

Katie Harrington:
[crosstalk 00:08:35] say Austin because that's what everyone says.

Alexis Robertson:
Yeah, but I just don't know ... But then Houston ... I didn't get to see much of Dallas. Dallas, I pretty much saw where I worked, just tall buildings. So Houston seemed like it had a bit more character to me, but I think that may be because I got to see more of it. So that's my diplomatic answer, because I'm not trying to ... I know people get upset. I don't need emails about this.

Katie Harrington:
No, not me. I support that answer.

Alexis Robertson:
Okay. But then tell me more about ... Like you said, for you to go what extensively is this conservative school, so why did that at first at least seem like a bit of a clash?

Katie Harrington:
Well, so when I say conservative, more than just the connotation of that term, every year US news puts out all these college rankings, top 10 whatever for every college. And A&M is almost always on the top 10 least LGBT friendly colleges.

Alexis Robertson:
I had no idea.

Katie Harrington:
I'm talking almost every year it is on that list. And so, for me, I knew I was LGBT when I was, I don't know, 17 is probably when I actually knew, but it could go back to that five year old contract of refusing to wear dresses. So who knows when I actually knew. I went to a pretty conservative high school in Houston. And so, to go from a conservative high school to a conservative college, it really just meant staying in the closet for another four years. Whereas, I'm sure if I went to a school in the north, or a small liberal arts school, I probably would've been out day one of college. And that just didn't happen at A&M. Most people I know, and I know a lot

of LGBT people from A&M, most of them were not out in college, or if they were, it was in the last few months when it was like, "Okay. We're getting out of the school."

Alexis Robertson:

All right. We're going to talk more about that for sure, but I'm going to keep with the college thread, or at least the academia thread. When did law school come into play? Because you mentioned you had this eye for PR marketing, I'm going to work for a team. Tell me more about that.

Katie Harrington:

Yeah, so I actually did an internship with the Houston Astros. I'm sure you can see right now, I actually have an Astros coffee mug in my hand. And I absolutely loved getting to work with them. But my dad started just having conversations with me about, "Why not law school?" And of course, I had never ... You think about being a lawyer, but not the actual steps of how to get there. And so, my dad starts planting this seed in my head of, "Oh. Well, you love sports. Why don't you just go to law school and become a sports agent?" And I did not think about how feasible or lack thereof that was at the time-

Alexis Robertson:

By the way, I feel like that's how it always starts. It always like, if I want to be a sports agent, I got to go to law school. But, okay.

Katie Harrington:

[crosstalk 00:11:27] I'm going to represent all these players on all these teams. And I'm like, "That sounds like a great idea." And so, he convinces me that it would be a good idea and I end up applying, taking your LSAT prep course and all of that. And I feel like since my dad and I really talked about it, I really wanted to do a good job and work really hard and show my parents that it was a good move for me. I was that type of person where I absolutely loved it. I love my classes. I definitely drank the Kool-Aid of law school. And it's funny, I remember interviewing with this woman at a firm once and she goes, "I always ask this question and there's only one right answer. Did you like law school?" And I was like, "I did. Yeah, I loved it." And she was like, "That was not the right answer."

Alexis Robertson:

That was the wrong answer. I wasn't sure. That's a trick question, by the way.

Katie Harrington:

Yeah.

Alexis Robertson:

You were supposed to say no, it's not practical enough for me-

Katie Harrington:

I guess. I don't know.

Alexis Robertson:

... because I want to be a practicing lawyer.

Katie Harrington:

Who knows?

Alexis Robertson:

Okay. And you went straight through? Did you-

Katie Harrington:

I did.

Alexis Robertson:

Was there any time off in between?

Katie Harrington:

No, just a short year of a backpacking trip and then off to law school.

Alexis Robertson:

That's awesome. That counts. That's wonderful. And where did you [crosstalk 00:12:43] go for ... I think you mentioned it, but I'm not sure. Where did you go for law school?

Katie Harrington:

I went to a school called South Texas College of Law and it's in downtown Houston, so I went back to my roots. And I lived at home for three years.

Alexis Robertson:

Really? Okay. And tell me a little bit about it. Granted, you're a bit removed from law school, but I just feel like, not only do I want to learn about you, but this is helping people learn a little bit about I think other areas, other markets. For those people that are like me and don't know a lot about Texas, just give me a little more about the law school.

Katie Harrington:

Yeah, so South Texas is a school that is really focused on trial advocacy. I think they have more moot court and mock trial championships than any other law school in the country. It's a huge deal at the school. And so, for me, I totally jumped right into doing moot court and became obsessed with it. I did maybe six or seven tournaments while I was in law school. It was such an adrenaline rush, where I just knew, "This is what I'm meant to do." And I had so much fun doing oral advocacy.

Alexis Robertson:

Why do I feel like maybe you were able to take something ... Like the spirit of sports or competition and find an equivalent with ... Am I on the right path there at finding it equivalent with law school?

Katie Harrington:

Absolutely, yeah. No, I feel like it's not necessarily the competitiveness of it, but just the pressure of being in the moment and having to work so hard to get there. I just really enjoyed it. And I have continued the sports. I've done crossfit for six years now. So I've become addicted to that since finishing school.

Alexis Robertson:

I say this on every podcast. I could take this a whole nother direction. I'm not going to, but I will share ... So I have some very nerdy health and wellness leanings and I've actually gone to a crossfit studio and did the non-crossfit classes. But when you follow that ancestral health, paleo movement, you can't help but pick up a fair amount. And also, so we're recording this now in August 2020, still very much in the midst of the coronavirus pandemic. When I was watching everything on Netflix earlier on, there's a couple crossfit documentaries that I found particularly-

Katie Harrington:

Oh, I've seen them all.

Alexis Robertson:

Yeah, we could talk more about that later. But let's transition to Foley a little bit. How does Foley come on the scene? How do you end up with Foley & Lardner?

Katie Harrington:

So I ended up doing a one year clerkship after law school. I went to work at the 14th Court of Appeals. It's a state appellate court located in Houston. And to back up from there, I actually ...

My first year of law school, I was the type of person, I didn't really know any lawyers. I didn't have lawyers in my family. And so, I felt pretty clueless about what should I be doing during my summers, where should I go work, when should I be applying? And so, it was January of the second semester of my first year and I realized, "Oh, everyone already knows what they're doing. That's cool. I should probably figure that out."

Alexis Robertson:

Can we pause on that for a moment?

Katie Harrington:

Yeah.

Alexis Robertson:

Just, that's a big deal. Because a bunch of people don't know what's going on, but the only ones talking about it are the ones who do know. And so, you feel so clueless and then you're like, "Wait, but aren't I in law school to learn? How does everyone already know what's happening?"

Katie Harrington:

Yeah. I'll never forget my first day of law school and you had to go around the classroom and say what type of law you wanted to do.

Alexis Robertson:

The first day?

Katie Harrington:

Yeah. And everyone's answers were so polished. And I just thought, "Am I supposed to know that? Because I don't know what ... I can't even name the areas of law."

Alexis Robertson:

I'm so glad you said that, because as I mentioned before we started recording, we are getting a fair amount of law students who are starting to listen. And I just hope that makes somebody feel better.

Katie Harrington:

I hope so too.

Alexis Robertson:

But it's true, because you get someone who's like, "Well, I'm returning to law school a bit later. I'm super interested in VC financing as it relates to the such and such sector." And you're like, "What?"

Katie Harrington:
Exactly.

Alexis Robertson:

Similarly, the world has changed since I went to law school and even since you went to law school, so maybe people are more intentional going in. But that feeling of not knowing what's going on. And I still joke about this, so just disclaimer, please no one do this. But that first summer of law school, part of me was like, "But what if I got a job at the mall?" And I know we don't do that anymore. I know we don't because of coronavirus. But what if I got a job at Banana Republic, or Ann Taylor? At least I'd get a discount. At least I'd have the wardrobe and I could get paid, because you're [inaudible 00:17:21] all summer, a lot of times you're looking at opportunities that are unpaid. And so, it was always a bit crazy to me. And that's still how the industry is. And once again, I don't want angry emails, but I would joke that, "That seems like a great compromise to me."

Katie Harrington:

Yeah. No, absolutely. I mean, that's what I ended up doing. So I sent my resume to 50 to 70 judges, just basically asking if I could intern with them. And I end up interviewing with Judge Ken [Wythes 00:17:50], who at the time was a district court judge for the 334th. And he goes, "You know what? You went to A&M, I went to A&M. If you want to come intern here, that'd be great." And so, I said, "Oh, yeah. That's awesome. I'd love to."

Katie Harrington:

And I interned with him. It was so great. Fast forward three years later, end of law school, Judge Wythes actually ended up getting appointed to the 14th Court of Appeals and he needed a briefing attorney basically the year I was going to graduate. And so, I ended up going to work as a briefing attorney for him and it was such a wonderful experience. It helped me with my writing so much and I absolutely loved getting to work there. And then ... And I know the question was, why did I come to [crosstalk 00:18:35]-

Alexis Robertson:

Yeah, [crosstalk 00:18:35]. Yeah.

Katie Harrington:

I'm getting there, I'm getting there. And so, I'm doing this clerkship and I absolutely loved appellate law. I loved getting to review the briefs and I thought I would love being on the drafting side. And so, at the time I thought, "I want to go work at mid-size litigation boutique firm, not a big firm." I really did not want to come to a big law firm.

Alexis Robertson:

That's how it always goes. It's always like, "Nope, I would never go to a large firm." But, anyway.

Katie Harrington:

Yeah, exactly.

Alexis Robertson:

Go on.

Katie Harrington:

And so, a staff attorney walked into my office one day and he said, "Hey, there is a former briefing attorney who works at Gardere Wynne Sewell and he said they're hiring. If you're interested, it's a big firm, so you're going to have to work." And I said, "Okay. That really wasn't on my radar, but yeah, I'd love to meet with them." And obviously, Gardere Wynne Sewell merged with Foley about two years ago. It was a regional Texas firm, about 250 lawyers, Houston office, about 60 attorneys. So I end up going to meet Scott Ellis, who still works in Houston as a partner there.

Katie Harrington:

And we meet at a coffee shop downtown and I tell him, "This is what I'm looking for. I want to be a really good lawyer and I want to develop my skills really early on. I want to go to trial. I want to do depositions." And he was like, "Yeah, we do that here. You can do that at this firm." And it really, from there on out, I mean, he stayed true to his promise. And that's when I ended up going to work there after my clerkship and he was right. I've gotten to do a ton of stuff and I absolutely love working here.

Alexis Robertson:

Okay. I have a couple different things I want to followup on. Here we go. The first thing, Scott Ellis is great. Hope to get him on the podcast. I think he's the recruiter partner, the hiring partner for our Houston office. Also randomly, he and I went to college together, just extremely random. We didn't know each other, but we both went to the American University. I just had to mention that. Two, there's two paths I want to take you down. One, I want to learn a bit about your practice, the development of your practice. But also, before we get there, let's pause, because

you mentioned you're out, LGBTQ woman. And how does that work? I don't need to get too into the details of your personal life, but I assume by the time you're clerking or when you're in law school you are out. But then, entering, whether it be clerking or entering a large law firm as an out gay attorney, what is that like for you? How did you navigate that?

Katie Harrington:

Yeah. No, there's a few parts to this question. I started coming out to people in college, but I fully came out to everyone, family and everything, in law school. That's when it felt right for me time-wise. And as I mentioned earlier, I'm super close with my family and I felt like they should know before the world knows. And so, for me, I tell them and I tell everyone in law school. And then I go into my clerkship, which was at the 14th and I just didn't feel comfortable being out that year, or being out at work, I should say. I was completely out outside of work, but this was a one year clerkship before court and it wasn't for me. And so, I was listening to your episode with Jack about omitting what you did from the weekend, and I did that every week.

Katie Harrington:

I was super guilty of doing that and just hoping people wouldn't ask who else was involved in my plans at the time. So then, fast forward, I get to Gardere, and I tell myself, "I am so done with doing that and living half of my life out and work-life not out." And at the same time, though, I think to myself, "I don't feel like I have to come out to anyone anymore and I'm so sick of having that awkward, uncomfortable conversation where it says I need to tell you something." And do the whole thing. So I was so done with that, at that point, and I'm basically thinking, "I'm just going to work this into conversations as I talk- "

Alexis Robertson:

You're just going to be yourself.

Katie Harrington:

Yeah.

Alexis Robertson:

You're just going to be who you are-

Katie Harrington:

Exactly.

Alexis Robertson:

... and see how it goes, basically?

Katie Harrington:

Yeah. Yeah, be myself. And so, I think, "I'm just going to start mentioning it in conversations." And then we have the Christmas party. I started at three months, I don't know anyone. I've only been there three months. And I think, "I'm just going to bring Stephanie and introduce her as my girlfriend and hope it goes over well." And so, I did that. And then it was super easy and that strategy worked out really well for me.

Alexis Robertson:

As usual, many things I could say, but a few things to backtrack. What you mentioned was, I think it's episode five, where I interview Jack Lord, who's the longtime partner at Foley, co-chair of our LGBTQA Affinity Group, so for anyone listening who wants to check that out. But yes, he talked about the closet and how insidious it can be and that feeling of, "Should I mention this, or shouldn't I mention that?" And one thing when I was speaking with him that we talked about is, the societal acceptance of someone who is within the LGBTQ community, it's dynamic, right? And I think it ... And I'm saying, "Right?" Maybe you can expand on this. But it really does depend on the community you're in, maybe where you grow up.

Alexis Robertson:

And so, for some people, they're probably at a place in their journey where it's just not even a question, right? Because of who they are, where they work. But for others, I can imagine it's still a very big issue. So I just like that you shared a bit of that, how in this one environment, it just didn't make sense for whatever reason, but in a different environment you're like, "I just need to be who I am."

Katie Harrington:

Yeah. And I think knowing your audience and your community and surroundings are all really important things. I mean, if I'm with a client and they work for an oil and gas company and they're older and really conservative, it's not something I'm just going to affirmatively bring up on my own. At the same time, I'm not going to lie, but I'm definitely going to avoid that conversation if possible. And that still happens to this day, which is sad, but I feel comfortable doing that.

Alexis Robertson:

Yep. And I'll give this example one more time for those who didn't listen to the Jack episode or who maybe didn't have the opportunity to, but within the kind of DNI circles, for someone like myself, and there's all sorts of trainings on Allyship and all that. I've been to one or maybe more where an exercise ... To give you a little sense of how hard it can be to hide who you are, is to omit the pronouns of your spouse. Now, this is assuming somebody ... I guess, straight,

cisgendered relationship, but unlike ... We just had terrible storms in Chicago and I was up on my roof and my husband, he helped me do X, Y, Z.

Alexis Robertson:

But imagine me telling that story about, "Yeah, there was damage at my house and it was okay. There were some branches that we removed." I have to totally change that. And so, for anybody who's never thought of that or encountered it, just consider what it would be like to either omit or try to change the pronouns of people in your life. And it's not the same as settling, but it gives you a tiny bit of ... I think a taste of the energy. I think it siphons energy away from someone to have to do that.

Katie Harrington:

Yeah. Even a few weeks ago, when we moved up to Boston, the mover was super chatty and he goes, "Why'd you move up here?" And I'm like, "Oh, my job." And he goes, "Well, who's that?" And I'm like, "My roommate." I don't know this mover. I don't want any sort of ... Something weird to happen. And so, he goes, "Oh, so you and your roommate moved to Boston?" I'm like, "Yes." Okay.

Alexis Robertson:

But that's such a real example of where you're like, "Yeah, I could say." And Stephanie's your wife now, right?

Katie Harrington:

Oh, so we're actually engaged. We're getting married next September.

Alexis Robertson:

Well, I'm so happy we got Stephanie introduced, so that the story of why you moved can make sense.

Katie Harrington:

Right.

Alexis Robertson:

But yeah, you don't know. And you're like, "I don't know this person. I want to make sure all my stuff makes it into my place." It's just such an important example. But, okay. Before we go back to your practice and litigation, I've been teasing this for a while, tell me more about the move. Why did you relocate to Boston?

Katie Harrington:

My partner, Stephanie, she just finished residency, four years later, of anesthesiology at UT in Houston. And last summer, she found out that she got accepted into a fellowship at Brigham And Women's doing cardiovascular anesthesiology. Extremely proud of her. And the first few months we thought, "Let's just do long distance for a year. It's no big deal. I'm working in Houston and I love the people I work with." And then as months go on, we start thinking about being long distance for a year and just ... We didn't want to do it. I would rather be in a new city with her. And really, my practice kind of allowed for me to be here, because I've gotten to work with partners in so many different offices that my practice kind of just stems beyond Texas now. And then of course, the pandemic hit, and I thought, "I really physically don't need to be in an office right now."

Alexis Robertson:

Yeah, it would feel a little absurd right now if you were working separately, because you're just like, "I don't see anybody any way. I could be working ... " Or you probably would've flown up and just been in Boston anyway.

Katie Harrington:

Yeah, exactly. I'd be working remotely for one year. But yeah, I asked the firm if that was something they'd be okay with, and they absolutely were, and they've been so supportive of it. And so, I feel like I get to basically work out of two offices now, because I have stayed connected in the Houston office. And so far it's been really good.

Alexis Robertson:

That's fantastic. When Katie and I first spoke, it was when I was doing outreach because of coronavirus and you were in the midst of gearing up for this, and that's the fun thing. Part of this podcast is obviously learning about Foley & Lardner as a firm, but we have 21 offices. And so, I'm just delighted that the firm, of course, would support you in working from a different office for a year. Because as you said, you're maybe one of the biggest fans of the Houston office. I mean, I think if you're able to get back there, I think you will. So let's actually now transition back. You're a litigator. What do you work on? Tell me about your practice.

Katie Harrington:

So my practice is general commercial litigation, businesses suing other businesses, which is what I tell non-lawyers when we talk about my practice. But a lot of it has been in the space of energy litigation, so we represent exploration and production companies, oil field service companies, and then outside of the oil and gas space, electricity companies, renewable energy companies. So really, the full spectrum of energy. And then in recent years, I've gotten to work

on stuff outside of that space for various clients, whether in the insurance industry, manufacturing, a bunch of different industries at this point. Just handling all types of litigation for those companies. I've gotten to do four arbitrations now, which have been really awesome and I actually got to do things in arbitrations, like present witnesses, cross-examine witnesses. And so, that's been really awesome. But I'm still waiting on my first jury trial.

Alexis Robertson:

I've practiced for seven and a half years, never made it to that jury trial, but ... You're at the sixth year, hopefully that is soon for you. What I find sort of funny is, yes, that strain of eventually being a lawyer was apparent when you drafted that contract when you were five or six. But it is drafting. So I was like, "I don't know. Where's this transactional thing?" But everything else you've said, you sound like a litigator through and through, including the loving moot court.

Katie Harrington:

Yes, absolutely.

Alexis Robertson:

And did you ever consider even briefly anything other than litigation once you were in law school?

Katie Harrington:

No, not for one second.

Alexis Robertson:

That was my guess. And I ask that, because as you said, you started law school and everybody seems to know what's going on, but you don't, so you have to figure it out. But when I'm talking to law students, I often tell them that you don't know it yet, but your bend toward one area of the law or another is actually really apparent, but you tend not to know it when you're in it.

Katie Harrington:

Yeah, absolutely.

Alexis Robertson:

I find that really funny. When I was a summer associate in law firms in law school, I never took a corporate assignment. I just didn't want to. I'd read them, but I was like, I don't know what this says. I can't do this. So apologies. I'm not trying to offend anybody who's corporate, but I do think there's a bit of a friendly rivalry sometimes between the transactional side of the house and

the litigators in any firm, where the litigators are like, "We don't fully know what you do, but we think we'll be litigating over it in about 15 years."

Katie Harrington:
Exactly.

Alexis Robertson:
Okay. But-

Katie Harrington:
Okay. I thought you were going to say, corporate is just overall a friendly practice, because I remember this discussion I had with a colleague in corporate. And a few years ago he asked how I signed my emails to opposing counsel. And I said, "I always just stick with regards, or thanks." And he goes, "Well, I use best." And I go, "Well, I can't say, 'Please send us these documents, or we might file a motion to compel. Best, Katie.'"

Alexis Robertson:
I had not considered that, but that might be right. And I'm talking more generally. I'm not putting any judgments on Foley's different department rivalries, but I think within the broader profession. So just for me to clarify that, that is important. But, okay. So now tell me more about ... Like you mentioned. Sorry, I'll back up, because I know that, as you said, Foley and Gardere merged. But I am interested to hear you expand a little bit more on just life as an LGBTQ lawyer at Foley, which some of that's also going to be Gardere. The stuff you wish people knew.

Katie Harrington:
Yeah. So I will say, it did feel a little differently going from Gardere to Foley. Gardere did not have any sort of LGBTQ Affinity Group and I was out at Gardere, obviously. I mean, Stephanie came to everything and I felt comfortable. But I have to say, after the merge and becoming Foley, I felt almost like I had been given superhero powers to just be so much more vocal about it and just say, "Hey, I won't be here Tuesday because I'm going to the firm's LGBTQ Affinity Group retreat." We have that. We're going to do that.

Katie Harrington:
And so, to me, I just felt like it gave me this platform to be so much more open and that was really exciting to me. And really, even when we merged and just finding out that there was an Affinity Group, I thought that was the coolest thing ever. And not that it was just five people, it's over 30 lawyers at the firm, as well as LGBTQ staff, which is so awesome. And so, I love being

a part of that group. I've met so many wonderful people through it. And getting to go to the retreat last year was just such an awesome experience for me.

Alexis Robertson:

I'm so sad that I missed it. I joined the firm shortly ... Maybe a few months after that. And now it's coronavirus, so we can't have any in-person retreats for a while. But we definitely will. We were actually considering doing a all diversity retreat, which of course, I mean at this rate we're probably talking 2022, let's be honest. But that's fantastic to hear. And having Jack on before, it's definitely I think probably the most or one of the most robust Affinity Groups at the firm and I know I have to mention this too, and it's also of course in Ally's. And when we start adding in the Ally's, just even the lists internally, we're in the hundreds of people, which I really think is a testament to that group and the role it plays at the firm, which I think is interesting.

Alexis Robertson:

One, so I think sometimes people, particularly ... Let's pick on people on the coasts, right? So for me, I grew up in Milwaukee. Someone from the East coast or the West coast, I grew up in flyover country. And then also with Foley's founding office being in Milwaukee, I think sometimes people may assume that our firm isn't as robust as it is with the Affinity Group activity. And so, that's why I just love having you expand on it, because that's not the first image that comes to mind.

Katie Harrington:

Yeah. And I assume the LGBTQ Affinity Group has lawyers from offices all over the country. I mean, I think we're pretty spread out, including Houston, Texas.

Alexis Robertson:

Yes. Indeed, we are. And then, can you tell me even more about ... And maybe they're about the same. One of the reasons Gardere and Foley merged is because I think they were similar firms. But for ... Keep talking about that law student who wants to learn about Foley. What's it like to be a litigator? What's the culture like at the firm and what do you like about it?

Katie Harrington:

Yeah. So the firm's definitely merged because they had such similar cultures and that turned out to be so true in terms of just the people. It's been such a good mesh between Gardere and Foley. I will say, my litigation experience at Gardere has been very similar to my litigation experience at Foley. And I was actually very concerned that that wasn't going to be the case after the merger. I thought we were going to be part of this huge firm where I was going to get pushed to the bottom in all of my cases and not get to do anything. And really, my work pretty

much stayed the same, or I got more responsibility going forward. And being a litigator at Foley, like I was a Gardere, we staff our cases pretty lean. So as an associate, you're typically working with one other partner, or maybe two depending on the size of the case.

Katie Harrington:

And as the associate on the case, you're basically in charge of most drafting and working on everything. As opposed to being on a case with six attorneys and you're just pushing paper. So my litigation experience has been where I'm at the level of responsibility and I have been since I was a young associate, of getting to do depositions, go to hearings, work with a partner on strategy and talk about what we're going to do for trial. And so, that's been exactly what I wanted and I've gotten to do that for the past six or so years.

Alexis Robertson:

I'm so happy that you went there. That was going to be my next question, was about staffing cases leanly, because like you said, there's just certain thoughts, particularly as a law student, where you're like, "I don't know what a large law firm is like, but I see that this firm has over 1,000 lawyers in the US," which is what we have. And you do assume that ... Whether it be litigation or even corporate, that you would be one of ... "I'm going to one of 15 attorneys." And it's just really nice to hear you explain how ... At least with how we staff at Foley & Lardner, that's not the case.

Katie Harrington:

Yeah, exactly. And that's exactly why I didn't want to go to a big firm, but luckily that didn't happen and that's just not how we do it here.

Alexis Robertson:

Yeah, that's perfect. And I sometimes wonder if someone's going to think I'm just recording commercials over here. I sent you the ... No, no. I just ask the question and I assume that the person's going to say something that others would want to hear.

Katie Harrington:

Did I get the script right?

Alexis Robertson:

I know. You messed up the script, Katie. Go back, we need to rerecord it. I'm just kidding.

Katie Harrington:

I'm glad you speak to ... Another part of the big firm thing that I was concerned about was just being a number out of the 1,000 and 1,100 you mentioned. And I don't feel like that at all. At this firm, I know people in every office. I feel like people at the top know who I am and that's really cool. And I never thought I would ever experience that.

Alexis Robertson:

I'm also happy you said that. And like I said, I'm not planting these responses. But it's so important, and as I've gotten to know the firm better ... And one of the things that actually brought me back to Foley was that culture, that surprisingly, I got a sense for even just in the few months that I was with the firm as a summer associate a very, very long time ago. And also, again, my apologies to the listeners, because they've heard me mention that about 15 times. But that's my life story. But, anyway. As we try to close, Katie, I'm going to ask you the same question also that I ask everyone. Which is, for your reflections or advice. And feel free to style it to the audience that makes the most sense for you, but whether it be to you, when you were, what? I guess, probably 22, 21 looking at law school. Stuff you wish you knew, or advice to that law student who's listening about navigating law firms and next steps.

Katie Harrington:

I think culture is key. Enjoying the people you work with, that is truly everything. And if you enjoy the people you work with, you hope that the firm is going to have similar people in other offices and you'll also enjoy working for them. But I actually have a good family friend who called me on Sunday, because he just finished a summer internship, asking what to do between litigation and corporate. And I was like, "If you like them both, it's just going to be about who you like working with. Which partners and associates do you prefer working with, because that's what you're doing for eight hours a day." You're with these people sometimes more than your family and you see them all the time, so you want to have more than a working relationship. I'm so fortunate that I actually am friends with a lot of the people I work with. So, to me, exploring the culture of a firm and enjoying the people there, that's the most important thing.

Alexis Robertson:

That is so true. I've often given that same advice, which is, yes, your practice area matters, but the people you're working with, they actually matter more. And it is hard to understand that until you are in the situation, so I hope people heed your advice. And in the meantime, Katie, I will just thank you so much for joining the podcast. And by the way, if somebody did want to reach out to you, or contact you, is the best way through Foley's website?

Katie Harrington:

Yeah. Just find my email on there and then shoot me an email.

Alexis Robertson:

All right. Well, thank you so much, Katie. And thank you for joining me on the podcast.

Katie Harrington:

Thank you.

Alexis Robertson:

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