

— VSB Attorney Profile —

Kathryn R. Montgomery

This is one in a series of Virginia Lawyer magazine profiles of state bar attorneys.



Kathryn Ramey Montgomery has been an assistant bar counsel at the Virginia State Bar since 2003.

A native of Danville, she received her bachelor's and law degrees from the University of Virginia. After graduation, she went to Phoenix, Arizona to practice with the firm O'Connor, Cavanagh, Anderson, Killingsworth & Beshears.

She returned to Virginia to practice at McGuireWoods LLP in Richmond for five years. There she was a litigator, focusing on toxic torts, products liability, professional liability, medical malpractice and workers' compensation.

Montgomery has been a volunteer for the Central Virginia Legal Aid Society, Meals on Wheels of Greater Richmond, and the Reading and Education for Adult Development Center, a literacy program in the Richmond metropolitan area.

You are a native of Danville. What was it like growing up there?

I had a very all-American childhood. There was a lot of riding bikes, skipping rope barefoot, chasing the ice cream truck and Sunday dinners at Grandma's house. My parents were strict but generous, and I was surrounded by people with a lot of love and good sense. The people from Danville are salt-of-the-earth folks.

How did your perspective on Danville and Virginia change as you went to Charlottesville and beyond?

One of the first things I discovered at U.Va. was that I had an accent. Until then, I thought I sounded like the people on television. I still can't hear my accent, though people continue to insist that I have one.

I haven't lived in Danville for over fifteen years, but I still think of it as home. And I think many former Danvillians feel the same way. The town has a lot of history and character; a lot of the people from Danville are characters themselves. Since I've been gone, I've met many people from many places, and to my surprise, I've run into fellow Danvillians as far away as Seattle. More than a few times, I've found that the person at the party telling the wildest stories and laughing the loudest is from Danville.

At U.Va., you served as vice-chair of the Bad Check Committee, which is an offshoot of the Honor Committee. How did that influence your choice of profession? Did that prepare you for your present job in VSB discipline?

It didn't influence my choice of profession at all; I wanted to be a lawyer since I was a little girl. But now that you ask, there are some parallels between my work on the Bad Check Committee and my current job. Just like the college kids who wrote bad checks, many of the lawyers who receive

discipline are smart, well-meaning people who simply made some mistakes.

You used to be a nanny.

I nannied for a family with three gorgeous, sweet children, the summer between college and law school. They were really good kids, but definitely a handful.

A friend of mine who is a lawyer with children said to me one Monday morning that she was glad to be back at work so she could finally get some rest. After caring for three kids, I could understand what she meant.

While in college, you interned for U.S. Senator John W. Warner in Washington. What did you learn from that?

I learned, at least a little bit, how the political system works. That summer Senator Warner was sponsoring a highway bill, and I saw first hand what it takes for a bill to become a law. It's one thing to read about it in a textbook, it's quite another to see the political machine in action.

In your office is a statue of Kokopelli, and you spent a couple years in Phoenix when you first began practice. What drew you there, what did you learn, and what does Kokopelli mean to you?

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I was recruited by a Phoenix law firm, and when I went out there to interview, I fell in love with the area and with the firm. The lawyers I worked with there were really smart, hardworking, decent people. We had a lot of fun. Arizona and Virginia are both beautiful, yet so different. I loved the desert, the hiking, the fact you could drive two hours up the road and be surrounded by snow-covered mountains. It was a great experience that enriched my life and expanded my horizons.

The Kokopelli reminds me of my time in Arizona. Plus, it's cute. For many of the Native American tribes indigenous to Arizona, the Kokopelli is a symbol of fertility. The Hopi say he brings unborn children to young women, and for that reason, he is both worshiped and feared.

With your experience at McGuireWoods, you bring understanding of big firms to the bar. Are there different challenges for big- and small-firm lawyers?

I think so. While big-firm lawyers certainly have their share of stressors, small-firm lawyers spend much more time handling the logistics of running a small business. As an associate at McGuireWoods, I had the luxury of not worrying about whether the firm's trust account was reconciled. Not so with small to midsize firms. Also, many

times the clientele is different; most big firms have large corporate clients, while the clients of many solo practitioners are everyday people or small businesses. If a corporate client is dissatisfied, it will take its work elsewhere. Typically, the clients of solo practitioners or small shops are more likely to file a bar complaint.

Sources tell us you are a fan of reality TV. Doesn't your job provide enough reality for you?

I do like *American Idol*. Who would have thought an amateur singing contest could be so entertaining? I'm not much for the ones where they eat worms or compete for romance.

Tell us about your family.

My husband, Michael Montgomery, is a partner in the Richmond office of Woods Rogers. He is the best thing that ever happened to me, and I feel so blessed to have married him. He's a little reserved, so he probably won't like me telling the entire bar what an intelligent, sweet, funny, generous and kind person he is.

I am an only child; my parents live in Danville. My dad, Lewis Ramey, is a Realtor and my mom, Martha Ramey, works for the Virginia Department of

Health as a state inspector of nursing homes. For the last twenty or so years, they have written a column for the local newspaper called "Eddie's Colyum," which is a mixed bag of jokes, local news, words of wisdom, and other folksy stuff. I talk to my parents almost daily and we visit as much as we can. I miss seeing them every day.

I am also the mother of two very silly dogs, Rudy and Billy.

Please describe how you see the role of your profession in society, and how you see practice of law shaping your future life.

I think the role of lawyers is what it's always been: to help people resolve their differences, to uphold the law, to work for justice. Lawyers get picked on a lot; it's politically correct to bash the profession. It may sound melodramatic, but if you think about it, without lawyers there is nothing to prevent society from slipping into chaos and tyranny. That being said, I like a good lawyer joke as well as the next person.

I don't know how the practice of law will shape my future. I can only hope that I will continue to learn and grow, and help people with their problems. That's what we're all supposed to be doing, right?