

# MS. GLACIER, I presume?

**Patricia Glaser grew up with dreams of playing for the Yankees. Now she plays a different kind of hardball**

**by ROSE NISKER**

PHOTOGRAPHY BY LARRY MARCUS

**A**s a young girl, Patricia Glaser didn't care much for dolls. She preferred more pragmatic toys; namely, commercial invoices. "I would ask my father to bring home carbon copies from his office so we could play business," she recalls. Seeing that Glaser is now one of the most well-known business attorneys in the Los Angeles area, it's easy to draw grand conclusions about the significance of her girlhood pursuits. But the supremely practical Glaser is not one to indulge in analysis. "I just liked to play with the paper," she says with a shrug.

Regardless of whether Glaser's early days of playing with carbon copies had anything to do with it, her talent for dealing with complex business litigation is impossible to deny. Over the course of her 30-year career, Glaser says she's "tried every imaginable kind of business case," taking on some of the biggest companies in the entertainment world and beyond. Her lengthy list of successes includes a whopping \$76 million win for MGM Grand in a retroactive insurance litigation suit, and a battle against Disney that cost the entertainment giant \$14 million. (Disney is now her client.) But Glaser is perhaps best known for a case that left actress Kim Basinger bankrupt and earned the attorney the charming nickname "Ms. Glacier."

In the 1993 lawsuit, Glaser's client, Main Line Pictures, claimed Basinger had backed out of a deal to star in the production company's film *Boxing Helena*, the morbid story of a surgeon who amputates the limbs of the woman he loves. Because she backed out, Basinger didn't have to portray the amputee in the movie, but Main Line's lawsuit still cost the actress an arm and a leg. With Glaser at the helm, the suit brought in an \$8.9 million judgment (later scaled down to \$7.4 million).

Glaser's tough demeanor during trial made Basinger so uncomfortable that the actress began referring to her as "Ms.

Glacier." Glaser was unfazed. "I thought it was funny," she recalls. "I don't think she meant it as funny, but you'd have to ask her that." Glaser shrugs. "It wasn't offensive at all," she says. "I sort of took it as a compliment."

Whether compliment or criticism, the nickname came as no surprise to those familiar with Glaser's tough litigation style. In fact, the highly publicized trial merely brought media attention to something the legal community had known for years—if you're dealing with Glaser, you'd better hope that you're on her side.

As Alex Yemenidjian, longtime client and former president of MGM Grand, explains, "When the opposing party finds out they'll be dealing with Patty, I've seen them react in absolute horror. They know they're in for a no-nonsense fight." Glaser herself says, "I want opposing counsel to know that whatever I tell them, they can take that to the bank. But I also want them to wake up every morning with a knot in their stomach knowing that they are going to deal with me."

As a name partner at Christensen, Glaser, Fink, Jacobs, Weil & Shapiro, Glaser's direct and often aggressive style fits the bill for a powerhouse firm with a reputation for being litigious. Glaser believes the reputation positively reflects her firm's fierce dedication to clients. She says, "I want our clients to feel that their interests are represented to the best degree within ethical boundaries. That means I'll play hardball when it's time to play hardball."

Glaser's confidence goes deeper than mere posturing—it's grounded in hard work and a self-assurance so natural it could only have been learned early on. Glaser explains that when she was growing up in Charleston, W.Va., her parents gave her a sense that she could achieve anything. For a girl whose dream was to play center field for the New York Yankees when most women didn't even work outside the home, their support made a lasting impression. "I was a little bit of a tomboy," she remembers, "and



wanted to be a professional baseball player. In the fifth grade I went to a game with my father and had an epiphany. I said, 'Dad, there are no girls out there.' He looked at me without missing a beat and said, 'Don't worry. By the time you're old enough to play, there'll be girls out there.'"

This early sense of unlimited possibility has been an asset in her legal career, particularly when dealing with gender issues. "For so many women of my generation, there were these artificial barriers put up. But they didn't even exist in my mind, so I didn't have to overcome them."

After high school, Glaser attended American University in Washington, D.C., where she studied international affairs with the intention of becoming a career diplomat. She soon realized, however, that she was too much of a "results-oriented" person to navigate the often circuitous channels of diplomacy. She went on to receive her law degree from Rutgers School of Law in 1973.

Soon after, Glaser made her first trip west of the Mississippi when she moved to Los Angeles to clerk for the late U.S. District Judge David W. Williams. She never left. She describes her adopted hometown as "one of the last vestiges of Ameritocracy. It doesn't matter who you know or what clubs you belong to or who your family is, if you're really good and work hard, you could do great here. Or, of course, you could die. But in that sense it's fair." Considering that Glaser likens the Charleston environment of her childhood to the Broadway play *Last Night of Ballyhoo*—full of Jewish intra-ethnic prejudice and Southern snobbery—it's no wonder she welcomed the less aristocratic ways of the Wild West.

Glaser was pleased to move to Los Angeles, and even more pleased to clerk for Judge Williams. Speaking with much reverence for the late judge, Glaser says, "I was somewhat in awe of him." Even then, however, the young Glaser wasn't too intimidated to be frank. "I remember one case where I disagreed with his ruling and told him the various reasons I thought he had made a mistake." At the time, Glaser recalls leaving the conversation sur-

prised by her own boldness. "But he later called me and said, 'I want to change my ruling.' I learned right then and there to have the courage of my convictions."

Her courage continued to flourish as she went on to join



Kim Basinger once dubbed Glaser "Ms. Glacier" during a trial. Glaser took it as a compliment.





**Above: Glaser goofing around with husband Sam Mudie. Left: With U.S. Supreme Court Justice Anthony Kennedy.**

Wyman Bautzer, the firm started by one of her early mentors, Greg Bautzer. To this day, a portrait of the legendary entertainment attorney sits on the credenza behind Glaser's desk. Glaser says she picked up a lot from Bautzer, in particular the habit of returning every single telephone call before leaving the office each day. "I'm not returning a call just to return it," she explains. "It's about being responsive to clients, and I think they deserve it." She adds, "Of course, I don't want people to waste my time, but I figure if you called me you had to have a reason, so if you're a billionaire or a janitor, you will get your call returned that day." Glaser's description of Bautzer—"wonderful to have as a friend and terrible to have as an enemy"—echoes the way colleagues and clients describe Glaser herself.

Glaser made partner in 1979. She says she feels "blessed" to have landed at Wyman Bautzer. When asked to name her other mentors at the firm, she responds, "Who wasn't?" Glaser also describes the benefit (and rarity at the time) of having a woman—Mariana Pfaelzer—as a senior partner. Glaser explains, "I say this with absolute love and affection for Mariana, but she terrorized the whole generation of men between us—not because she was a screamer and a yeller about having equality for women but just by being there and being a wonderful lawyer. By the time I came along, I didn't have to fight that fight."

In the late '80s, the situation at Wyman Bautzer took a turn for the worse. Glaser, along with 11 other lawyers headed by star attorney Terry Christensen, left the firm. It was a rocky time that came to a climax when Christensen's new firm filed suit over the terms of the separation. Wyman Bautzer eventually settled and closed its doors in 1991. Glaser believed strongly that the move was necessary and, after the success of the lawsuit, she felt "entirely vindicated."

In her early days as an associate at Wyman Bautzer, Glaser remembers walking by the partners' offices and overhearing telephone conversations. "I would hear them spewing out all this advice and I would think, 'I want to do that.'" Although she was glad to leave her associate years behind, she's quick to add that "doing the grunt work is not a penalty; it's the process you go

through to be a good lawyer. If you think of it as a penalty, you're in the wrong business."

Glaser's belief in the importance of preparation continues to be just as strong now as it was when she first started out. "In the practice of law," she says, "you have to have guts, not stupid guts, but guts that come from knowing that you're really prepared." Glaser remembers sitting in a Las Vegas hotel room years ago, the night before trial was set to begin for the enormous MGM Grand retroactive insurance suit. She received a call from her client, billionaire Kirk

Kerkorian, who wished her luck and asked her a simple question. "He said, 'Patty, are we gonna win or are we gonna lose?'" Glaser recalls the moment as one where her life flashed before her eyes. "I could have sat there and went through, 'Well on the one hand this and that, but on the other hand that and the other.' Instead I said, 'We're going to win.'" She adds quickly, "Of course, you never know if you're going to win—I'm not that presumptuous—but I was well prepared, I really knew the case and we were right, so yeah, we were going to win." Clearly, the other side agreed with Glaser's assessment; they settled for \$76 million right after Glaser and her team selected the jury.

Glaser thrives on high-pressure situations, a quality that's highlighted by her frequent use of sports analogies. "I want the ball in the last 10 seconds of the game," she says, describing her trial tendencies. "Not every basketball player wants that—it doesn't make them less of a player, but it's just something that I enjoy."

For all her tough pragmatism, Glaser has a surprisingly ardent superstitious streak. "When I have a good trial day, I try to remember everything I did and make it my routine." From the time she gets up in the morning to when she brushes her teeth to what earrings she wears, Glaser follows that routine religiously throughout the trial. It's a quirk that some people might find ridiculous but for her, "it works."

Whatever her methods, Glaser's success continues at full speed. While she has many obligations outside of her practice—serving on the board of both the Center Theatre Group and the Geffen Theater Board, helping to produce independent plays, keeping up with various other philanthropic endeavors—she doesn't intend to get out of the legal game anytime soon.

While Glaser's opponents can't take comfort in the proximity of her retirement, perhaps they'll be relieved to know that she does have a soft side. Just ask about her two step-grandchildren, aged 4 and 1, from her marriage to former Pittsburgh Steeler Sam Mudie. "They own me," she says. And while whipping her opponents in the courtroom is great, Glaser says, "when those kids visit me and their eyes light up—that's the best thing in the world." ❖