

## Finding Pueblo

BY KATHLEEN HEARN CROSHAL



**I**n 1943, a group of Italian soldiers, who had fought alongside their German allies in North Africa, were captured. Eventually these Italian prisoners of war were shipped to the United States, and a small group of them were sent by train to a prisoner of war camp at the Pueblo Ordnance Depot.

After Italy surrendered on September 8, 1943, these prisoners were given greater freedom. In Pueblo, they worked in the fields tending crops and the like. The “prisoners” were allowed to leave the facility on the weekends, and some of them attended Sunday mass at local Italian Catholic churches. Eventually these men were invited to other church activities, including dances and dinners, and several met and fell in love with Pueblo women.

After the end of World War II, these Italian soldiers were returned to Italy. However, love won out, and some of them later returned to Pueblo, married their sweethearts, and settled permanently in Pueblo to live and raise their families.

My own story of how I came to call Pueblo home isn't quite so dramatic, but it does have its fair share of ups and downs. I'm telling it here to provide some insight into what it's like to live and practice law in Greater Colorado.

For some added perspective, I also asked a few younger lawyers to share what drew them to Pueblo. When reading their stories, I was excited to discover that my experience of mentoring, opportunity, community, and collegiality still exists in the Pueblo legal community today.

### **My Story**

I grew up in the suburbs of Cleveland, Ohio, convinced I would never live in a city smaller than Cleveland. I eventually became a teen wife and mother. Roughly six years into the marriage, with children ages 5 and 6, my husband and I decided we should move to Colorado. It was a geographic “cure” for our marriage. My husband applied and was accepted to Southern Colorado State College (SCSC) in Pueblo, sight unseen.

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### **First Impressions**

Before the move, we took a six-week road trip out West. The first time I saw Pueblo, I was coming from Cañon City heading east on Highway 50. I thought Pueblo would be in the mountains because of its elevation. When I realized it was a steel city in the desert high plains with a population of only about 100,000, I started crying and continued to cry off and on for hours. I was leaving behind Cleveland, an industrial city where the river had burned, and where the steel industry was huge. I had imagined Pueblo as an idyllic Colorado mountain town.

On the second day of my crying fits, my husband told me that Pueblo was the home of the Colorado State Hospital, and that if I didn't stop crying, he intended to have me admitted. I stopped crying!

### **Moving On**

Once settled in Pueblo, I joined my husband at SCSC. But about a year and a half later, we divorced, and I transferred to the University of Colorado in Boulder. I wanted to attend a school that had a national reputation so I could eventually pursue a career in a big city. After earning my undergraduate degree, I worked and lived in Denver and later St. Louis. Then I moved back to Boulder to attend law school.

When I graduated from Colorado Law, I was a single parent solely supporting two children. I needed to find a job fast. I interviewed for two jobs in Pueblo: a county attorney position and a deputy district attorney position. I was offered both positions and decided on the deputy DA job. My plan was to work in Pueblo for a short while and then pursue a career in communications or entertainment law. But then life happened!

### **Pueblo, Take Two**

When I started working in Pueblo in 1979, I was one of about 10 women lawyers there. The entire Pueblo bar comprised about 150 lawyers. I quickly learned that the legal community in Pueblo was welcoming. If you did your homework, you could call pretty much any attorney, even those with the best reputations in town, and they would make time to meet with you. Even the judges were accessible and provided mentorship.

I discovered there were many opportunities. For example, when I was a sole practitioner, many of the established lawyers routinely sent me cases they didn't want to take (often court-appointed work). Attorneys easily got to know one another. With hard work and a good reputation, I became an associate and later a partner in an old established Pueblo law firm handling cases not only in Pueblo, but throughout Southern Colorado and in federal court. I did general civil work, litigation, and appellate work for banks, a hospital, a school district, the newspaper—a veritable who's who of Pueblo businesses.

I also had the opportunity to get to know community leaders and become involved in the community. And when I really needed to have the amenities of a major metropolitan area, Denver was only 120 miles away up I-25—perfect for a weekend visit!

Some 40 years later, I'm still proud to call Pueblo my home.

### **Their Stories**

Now, a few of my fellow Puebloans answer the question, "Why Pueblo?"

#### **Kyle Aber, Pueblo County Bar Association President**



As a transplant to Pueblo myself, I'm very much aware of the complete befuddlement that falls upon some people when you tell them you're going to be living in Pueblo, and that doing so is your free and voluntary choice. I was born and raised in Arvada, went to college at the University of Colorado–Boulder (Go Buffs!), and earned my law degree from the University of Denver (Go Pios!). For the first 28 years of my life, I lived in and around the Denver metro area, and like a lot of Denverites, I knew a lot about Pueblo's reputation but not a lot about Pueblo itself. So when I graduated from law school and the Pueblo DA's office was the first job offer I received, I had to make a choice: I could wait around for a different job, continue with my student loans in forbearance, and avoid that city down south that I had heard so many bad things about, or I could get outside of my comfort zone and give Pueblo a chance.

**The more I spoke to attorneys who stayed in the area, the more I started to realize that a lot of them came to Pueblo planning to leave after a short while and then just never got around to it. The longer I stayed in Pueblo, the more I realized that I was one of them.**

At first, I was a short-timer. My intention was to get some experience, kick off my career, and then move back to the metro area. I found there were a lot of lawyers in Pueblo with the same plan, and while it is true that many of my colleagues left Pueblo after a few years, I noticed that some didn't. The more I spoke to attorneys who stayed in the area, the more I started to realize that a lot of them came to Pueblo planning to leave after a short while and then just never got around to it. The longer I stayed in Pueblo, the more I realized that I was one of them.

Pueblo, it turns out, has a lot to offer. While all my metro-area friends complained about the influx of people moving to Colorado, I was enjoying a five-minute commute. When my metro friends started saving to buy a home for their families, I had already purchased a house for the price of their down payment. And when all of those young attorneys I graduated with told me how underappreciated they were at their jobs, I was happy to tell them about the



## HOME OF HEROES

In 1993, Congress proclaimed Pueblo America's "Home of Heroes," in recognition of it being home to a record four recipients of the Medal of Honor. Here are some other fascinating people, places, and events that played a role in Pueblo's history:

- Zebulon Pike
- Cuerno Verde
- James Beckwourth
- the Christmas Day Massacre at Fort El Pueblo
- International Boundary—Arkansas River
- Bat Masterson
- Doc Holliday
- Charles Goodnight
- Damon Runyon
- the Mineral Palace
- the Eden train wreck
- the Great Flood of 1921
- Woodrow Wilson
- Jessie Haver Butler
- Dutch Clark.

Pueblo is truly a quintessential city of the American West!

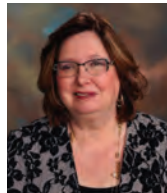
immense support and respect I received even in my first years of practice. I had truly fallen in love with my adopted city of Pueblo; I was no longer a short-timer.

Sure, Pueblo faces its own set of problems, and nowhere you live will ever be perfect, but being a young professional in a community that needs young professionals is a pretty special feeling. I've now been in Pueblo for five years, enjoying countless opportunities that I never would have had if I had stayed in the metro area. Rather than being written off as a naïve youth, I was warmly received in community organizations that listened to and respected me right away. I was able to purchase a home even while paying off law school loans for both me and my wife. I've made lifelong personal and

professional friends, all of whom enthusiastically welcomed me to my adopted home. And even though I graduated less than seven years ago, this year I was elected president of the Pueblo County Bar Association, because what Pueblo needs more than anything else is hard workers with good ideas.

So, I close with an offer and a promise: to anyone who is a hard worker with good ideas, please consider joining us here in the Home of Heroes, even if you're a short-timer like I was. While not all of you will end up staying, I promise that some of you won't ever want to leave. At the end of the day, Pueblo just has too much to offer.

### *Danita Alderton, COBALT Graduate*



I didn't have to think long and hard about why I've practiced in Southern Colorado for more than 13 years. I fell in love with Pueblo on my initial visit—it's a big city with a small-town atmosphere. The area is rich with history and has so much to offer, including numerous parks, a historic zoo, graceful Victorian homes, the Riverwalk, museums, several art galleries, Pueblo Reservoir, easy access to the mountains, bike trails, activities for the public, Colorado State University–Pueblo, and Pueblo Community College.

It's a beautiful town, but as a lawyer, so much of the beauty here is seen through the people—not just our local bar association but the community we work with. Historically, Pueblo has always been a melting pot because the steel mill attracted a culturally diverse population. I have always been amazed at Pueblo's blend of cultures, with their various celebrations and the families who maintain their heritage through their own customs that have been handed down through the generations. You cannot set foot in Pueblo without feeling that cultural diversity and pride.

I'm proud to be a partner with Altman, Keilbach, Lytle, Parlapiano & Ware, PC. Primarily through my mediation practice, I often hear attorneys from other jurisdictions comment on how collegial our bar is. It is so true. Not only is it a friendly bar, but we are there for

each other when times are tough. So, why do I practice primarily in Pueblo? I cannot imagine practicing anywhere but Southern Colorado! I'm a transplant from Nebraska, but I consider myself fortunate to call Pueblo home.

### *Cobea Becker, CBA Region 4 Vice President*



Having practiced law in Pueblo for 17 years now, I truly believe that Pueblo is the best place to practice. I've practiced all over the state and have appeared in many courts, both state and federal, and Pueblo is where I choose to practice law. The private bar wants younger attorneys to thrive and to continue practicing in Pueblo, so mentoring is of the utmost importance to them. Other attorneys are more than willing to meet for lunch and answer questions. I've drawn from the knowledge of these experienced attorneys many times.

The thing I really cherish about practicing law in Pueblo is that there isn't an air of competition among the attorneys. While we all inevitably have cases against one another, when an attorney needs help with coverage or really anything, other attorneys immediately step in to help. The sense of community is amazing.

Pueblo has grown in size and population exponentially since I started practicing here in 2003, and it likely will keep growing. The bar members and legal community are welcoming, and I certainly hope that more young lawyers want to come and make Pueblo their home.

### **Conclusion**

My two main objectives as CBA president are to engage diverse and statewide populations, and to utilize new and young attorneys.<sup>1</sup> I hope these stories about my adopted home help advance these goals in some small way. To that end, I'll be including more fun facts about Pueblo in each of my Messages.

Until next time! 

### **NOTE**

1. These are the "E" and "U" goals of the CBA's REFOCUS 2020 Strategic Plan, [www.cobar.org/About-the-CBA/Governance](http://www.cobar.org/About-the-CBA/Governance).