

Rising Star: King & Spalding's Elizabeth Taber

Law360 (August 7, 2018, 1:35 PM EDT) -- King & Spalding LLP partner Elizabeth Taber has defended major companies from groundwater contamination lawsuits and other tort claims, including representing Halliburton in litigation that caught the eye of Erin Brockovich, earning her a spot as a one of five environmental attorneys under age 40 honored by Law360 as Rising Stars.

ON TELLING A STORY THROUGH LITIGATION:

When Taber first started her career, she did a little bit of everything. But she found her tort cases, which included environmental litigation, to be “the most interesting of the lot,” she said. Those cases were complicated and involved a lot of interesting science, Taber said, and gave her the opportunity to actually work with people.

“It’s challenging,” Taber said. “It’s challenging to take the kinds of facts that I deal with and the kinds of science that I’m working with and try to turn that into a story for a jury down the road.”

Taber, who majored in journalism for her undergraduate degree, said that finding and telling the story was a motivating factor for her, noting she is often dealing with the “other side of the story” as an attorney usually on the defense side in toxic tort and mass injury cases.

She said that part of what made the work fun was “investigating all of the facts and gathering up all the historical stuff, figuring out the science that’s at play — and oftentimes there’s a lot of different disciplines like hydrogeology and toxicology and

RISING ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ STAR



Elizabeth Taber
King & Spalding

Age: 35
Home base: Houston
Position: Partner
Law school: University of Houston Law Center
First job after law school: Associate at King & Spalding

remediation, all these different things — and then trying to put all of those puzzle pieces together to create something that is understandable for people who don't have to deal with this stuff in the day-to-day."

HER BIGGEST CASE:

One of Taber's most impactful cases was actually her first case, a personal injury suit against Kellogg Brown and Root Inc. stemming from a plant explosion in Point Comfort, Texas, in 2005. Taber was part of the team that represented KBR in the four-week trial that resulted in a win for her client.

"I worked on it from start to finish — it was where I took my first depositions, it was the first trial that I've ever been to, it lasted for a month and we got a full defense verdict," Taber said. "It showed me how everything works together and how the things you do early on in a case end up mattering and the strategies and the steps that you take to build out your theme and what you're going to say kind of come together in the end."

The case was a confirmation for Taber that she wanted to work in tort law and build a trial practice, she said.

"It was my first one, but one I think that really put me in gear and helped me find the right path for me as a young lawyer and directed what I would do with my practice," Taber said.

RECENT SUCCESS:

In January, Taber helped secure the resolution of several mass joinder lawsuits and a proposed class action against Halliburton Energy Services Inc. with hundreds of residents of Duncan, Oklahoma, alleging the company's past missile cleaning work contaminated their groundwater.

As part of a core group of partners representing Halliburton, Taber led the day-to-day work during the almost seven years of litigation, including coordinating with experts in a number of disciplines, driving discovery efforts and drafting motions.

They were able to score several victories before the cases settled, Taber said, pointing to their early defeat of the plaintiffs' Resource Conservation and Recovery Act claims and their successful fight against class certification.

"That one was a pretty big one," Taber said, noting that the case even prompted a visit from Erin Brockovich, the attorney featured in the Julia Roberts movie sharing the same name, who came to the city in 2011 to discuss the water contamination issue with the residents.

ON FINDING PRIDE IN THE DAY-TO-DAY:

“It’s the little things in the day-to-day that make me proud, the smaller victories, the ones that kind of keep me going along the road — like a witness that does a really good job or beating back a Daubert challenge on an expert that you need in a court case or just kind of coming up with a solid defense strategy or finding that one document that makes all the difference in the world,” Taber said.

She added that a particularly meaningful experience for her has been a pro bono case she's worked on the past several years, representing two siblings who fled to the U.S. from Honduras and are seeking lawful status. Since she hadn't yet obtained that status for them, Taber said she couldn't call it her proudest moment, but said that they had scored some victories in court and that the process has been rewarding.

“Along the way, I’ve really gotten to know my two clients and have seen them grow from, you know, kids into teenagers — now one of them is 18,” Taber said. “Just kind of being with them along the way and continuing to be with them on this huge thing that they have to deal with day to day has been very rewarding. It’s not something you get to do in a toxic tort practice usually.”

— *As told to Danielle Nichole Smith*

Law360's Rising Stars are attorneys under 40 whose legal accomplishments belie their age. A team of Law360 editors selected the 2018 Rising Stars winners after reviewing more than 1,200 submissions. This interview has been edited and condensed.