

Bio - Janet (Corbett) Sparks

My high school years at Burges started with a jolt. Two days before I registered as a freshman my father died. He had lost his agonizing eight-month battle with cancer, leaving our happy family devastated.

I thought I had learned two things from that experience: I would never again allow myself to be so unprepared for death. I would also put aside my girlhood dreams of getting married and having children. What was the point if it could all be taken away from you by death of a loved one?

But as we all know, death never gets any easier and life takes many unexpected turns.

Being a student of Burges High School was a good thing for me at that point in my life. Shy and withdrawn, I managed to hide in the shadow of my good friend Judy (Julie) Duncan, whose friendship has remained throughout the years. Like most, I look back now and realize how many teachers at Burges influenced my life.

Before my father passed away he told me and my brothers how important it was to get a college degree. The summer after graduation I enrolled at Texas Western, only to have my dreams of graduating cut short by illness. After a six-month respite, I didn't have the money to continue my education. I decided to move to Dallas and start my career.

Why Dallas? I have to confess, Judy and I signed up for the Future Teachers of America mainly to go on the group's senior trip. What fun it was running up and down the hallways of the Adolphus Hotel and sightseeing in the big city! I immediately knew I would someday live there.

Working for five years in downtown Dallas, I credit two jobs that carried me into the field I am still in today. I worked for a prestigious law firm and later as a manager of a temporary employment service, at that time a very troubled franchise.

I met my husband, Tim Sparks, a graduate of Ysleta High and UTEP, in 1970. Tim had lost his wife to Lupus, leaving him with two little boys. After a two-and-a-half month courtship we married. Last Valentine's Day we celebrated our 42nd anniversary. Sam and Jeff live in Washington, one an engineer in Seattle, and the other a manager of information services in Tacoma. They are loving, devoted sons and we couldn't be luckier. Neither has married and I often wonder if the loss of their mother, at ages two and six, left its mark on them as well.

Tim's career took us first to Washington and then to Colorado. As he continued working in his field of human resources and labor relations, I got involved in the franchise community, working for a franchise development consultant. That is where I became enthralled with the world of franchising.

Part of my job was overseeing the *Continental Franchise Review* newsletter, which my employer Tom Murphy founded in the mid-1970s. It was considered to be “the news source” of franchising, with hard-hitting editorials on the back page. My husband and I purchased the *CFR* newsletter in 1990, and I continued to publish it for eight years. For almost twenty-five years I have attended franchise meetings and legal symposiums across the country.

Franchise Times approached me in 1999 about buying the *CFR newsletter* and incorporating it into their magazine. The president offered me the associate publisher position and asked if I would become a columnist, writing editorials and reporting on legal issues. Eventually, I switched to being an independent reporter, allowing me up to write and blog for other publications, including an online journal for franchisees. Blue MauMau is aptly named for a Polynesian fish that swims in schools to protect itself. Due to irreconcilable differences, I left *Franchise Times* in 2012.

Although franchising is a vital segment of the business world, it is also a legal battlefield for franchisors and franchisees. Most people would never think that by signing a franchise agreement they could lose everything they have—homes, cars, kids’ college funds and retirement money. Some lose their families and some even lose their lives, due to stress and suicide.

Today, I continue blogging and writing, mainly as an investigative reporter. My husband would love to see me retire, but I’m having a hard time conceding to that idea. This has become my mission in life—exposing the many abuses, helping protect franchisees, and enlightening investors before they sign on the dotted line of a franchise contract.

Last January my friend and mentor Tom Murphy passed away at age 94. He never completely stopped working. No, I don’t plan on working until I’m in my nineties. But for now, I’m still on a mission.

