7 Inspiring Lawyer Stories for Be Kind to Lawyers Day

Written by Teresa Matich

Lawyers sometimes get a bad rap. However, many lawyers work long hours fighting for justice, defending those who need it most, and upholding the rule of law.

As lawyer Mike Whelan put it, lawyers are actually "[some of] the smartest, most qualified, and most compassionate members of your society." We couldn't agree more.

In honor of Be Kind to Lawyers Day, we asked lawyers and legal professionals to share some of their most rewarding experiences working in legal. For the uninitiated, Be Kind to Lawyers Day was started in 2008 by Steve Hughes, a public speaking professional. He worked closely with lawyers, and believed they did not deserve the negative attention they regularly received.

Read these inspiring stories from the legal community, and remember to be kind to a lawyer in your life today.

1. Nurturing a love for child advocacy

"I got into law to do child advocacy. While I was waiting for my bar license, my supervising attorney took on a pro bono Guardian ad Litem case because she knew it was something that I wanted to do.

It has been one of the most complex, harrowing, and heartbreaking cases this small town has seen. The parents are both borderline unfit. Child Protective Services has been involved throughout the children's' lives, and the state is the only progenitor of services because of the underemployment of both parents.

Now that I'm an attorney, I have been able to work on the case in a greater capacity. I've been negotiating school services and state benefits, and have been reaching out to providers to get these children the services they need.

... It makes coming into work every day so worth it."

– Ashley MacKenzie, Law Clerk, Law Office of Jill V. Johnson Vigil, LLC

2. Helping refugees

“I pro bono helped a refugee family obtain guardianship over their young niece. Their landlord said they’d be evicted unless they could legally prove the child was part of their family.”

– Marquetta Stewart-Brown, Attorney, Law Office of Marquetta Stewart-Brown

3. Difficult times made a little easier

“I was once able to help a lady whose son had been murdered figure out what to tell the hospital and doctors so she could get access to her son’s emergency room medical records without having to open a formal estate administration procedure and to get appointed as Administrator of his estate. There were no significant probate assets—no will, no heirs other than the parents, and no need to do an estate administration—but she needed access to the medical records. I found the provision that authorized her to have access, told her what to say, and it worked.”

– Loraine DiSalvo, Partner at Morgan & DiSalvo, P.C.

4. Breaking the cycle of violence

“In law school I did a lot of pro-bono work with survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault. One woman had a very abusive on-again-off-again boyfriend. When she came to me it was the fourth time she had filed a protective order against him (she had voluntarily dismissed the prior ones). I helped her tell her story and she won.

Months later on my way out from another big court battle I found out from a clerk that she had voluntarily dismissed it again. She told the clerk she was lonely without him.

A year later, she came back to me because he had abused her again. I had my reservations but I agreed to help her anyway. She told her new story to the same judge (a judge who thankfully understood the cycle of violence) and we won again. This time she moved away, made new friends, and the protective order stayed.”

– Jordan Couch, Attorney at Palace Law

5. Persistence pays off

“In the late 1990s I represented a single mother, pro bono, of two young kids who was caught in a bad situation because she let her ex-husband, the children’s father, watch the kids. While “watching” the kids, he passed out, and the youngest of the kids drowned.

The Department of Human Services (DHS) got involved, placed the surviving child in foster care and accused the mother of being a neglectful parent. The case lasted for over 10 months. It involved multiple hearings, as well as an allegation that I filed a frivolous motion seeking the recusal of the judge—an allegation that the appellate court determined was unfounded.

About half-way through this process, the DHS returned the child to his mother realizing that she was a fit parent, and then it became a fight where the parent, the child’s ad litem, and DHS were all wanting the case closed but the court was refusing for some inexplicable reason. Finally, with no reason to keep prolonging matters given everyone’s agreement that the mother was a decent person and was just in a bad spot, the case was closed.

The last that I heard, mother and son were doing well in another state.”

– Todd VerWeire, Lawyer at Law Office of W. Todd VerWeire

6. Families reunited

“Less than a month ago, I began representation of a father in a dissolution of marriage. He came to me after his wife left the family home with their seven-year-old daughter. The wife said she had left the state, but would not tell him where they were. Normally, I would be suspicious that there was some sort of domestic violence. But, this person had been a client and friend of our firm for many years—referring many people to us over the years.

Even more concerning than her leaving the state was the fact that the wife was not a U.S. citizen ... She was in possession of the child’s passport, and had threatened to take the child to her home country.

We filed a new divorce case along with an emergency ex parte motion requesting that my client be given sole legal custody, including an order requiring the immediate return of the child. Of course, that only would only help if we could find the mother and the child.

Through my client’s friends and family, we believed the wife may have been in Georgia, and may have been getting ready to leave the country. I worked with law enforcement, but they were not much help. I also contacted the U.S. State Department’s child abduction

prevention group. A lot of phone calls were made, but there was no success.

Miraculously, my client received a cell phone bill from Verizon. Apparently, the wife had signed up for a new cell phone number, but the bill went to her old address. The phone number had an area code in Tennessee and the prefix helped us narrow the search.

On a hunch, I contacted the school system in the area. I received a response from the school district's attorney. I send the attorney a copy of the court order and he was able to confirm that the child had been enrolled in the school system, but refused to provide any further information until the out-of-state order was domesticated and acknowledged by a Tennessee court.

I found local counsel in Tennessee to assist my client. The father travelled to Tennessee and was in court the very next day (Friday) with the local counsel. The local sheriff was able to track down the mother and get her served. The child was immediately placed in my client's care. A hearing was set for the following Monday where the mother appeared and attempted to fight the order. But, in the end, my client was the successful one.

It took a week and a half from the time that he hired me–just over two weeks total since the wife left. He returned home with his beautiful daughter. She was reunited with the rest of her extended family. She was returned to her old school with her friends.

The case isn't over yet. I have been told that the wife has decided to stay in Tennessee.

This roller coaster of a case has certainly topped my list of rewarding work as an attorney. The day my client brought his daughter home was a huge relief and a very happy occasion indeed!"

– Jonathan Schmidt, Partner at Nazette, Marner, Nathanson & Shea, LLP

7. Becoming the lawyer of choice

"From the lead attorney/owner of my firm:

'I have a client that has had 11 personal or business matters in the past eight years. Four of her family members and their spouses have also used us (same last name) [as well as] a shirttail relative (same last name) that has become an employee. Clio helps me accurately address their individual issues and concerns and find the correct contact info. It also keeps their matters organized! They love me. Thanks Clio!'"

– Trish Phillips, Practice Manager at RB Legal LLC

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