

"If Not Higher"

Saul Bellow told of a village rabbi so revered that when he disappeared each Friday morning, his followers asserted he rose to Heaven to talk with God. A skeptical newcomer hid one Friday outside the rabbi's home to discover the rabbi's true whereabouts.

The rabbi rose, proceeded into the woods, and felled a tree. Gathering a large bundle of wood, he went to a dilapidated shack where a widow lived with her infirm son. He left the wood—a week's worth—and returned home.

The newcomer became one of the rabbi's followers. And whenever he heard another villager claim, "On Friday mornings our rabbi ascends all the way to Heaven," the newcomer would quietly add, "If not higher."

Pro Bono Week, October 23-29, invites some stories of my own.

- Abandoned by his parents and savagely beaten by his caretakers, the police, and gangs, Juan fled El Salvador; Human Rights Initiative of North Texas volunteers Melissa Oosterhof and John Bray secured permanent resident status and enrolled him in school.
- Terry Anstee with Disability Rights Texas won previously denied medical benefits for Linkyn, a child with a genetic disorder, microcephaly, and developmental delays.
- Isabella was powerless to protect herself or her children from her brutally abusive husband until Laurie Hallmark with Legal Aid of NorthWest Texas helped her obtain a divorce, child support, and a permanent protective order; Isabella now pursues her nursing degree.
- Adrian Bower of Cox Bower currently handles five expunction cases for the Dallas Volunteer Attorney Program; success means a client's next job application isn't reflexively rejected due to a dismissed charge.
- Advocates for Community Transformation (ACT) volunteer David Harper of Haynes and Boone represented 12 clients to resolve four West Dallas crime properties, including the court-ordered demolition of a longstanding drug house.
- Ms. A had scant time to organize her affairs before degenerative brain disease robbed her of capacity; Lone Star Legal Aid volunteer Alicia Handy and her Latham & Watkins colleagues dropped everything to document and ensure Ms. A's wishes.
- Beacon Law volunteer Kate Rainey with Vinson & Elkins tackles the fines and fees that consign her clients to perpetual homelessness due to inability to obtain an ID.
- Sharon Steckler with Fort Bend Lawyers Care rescued a young Army veteran with a special-needs child from domestic abuse. That mother says the help "literally saved my life."
- Texas RioGrande Legal Aid volunteer Laura Martinez represented the partially disabled victim of multiple sexual assaults, obtaining protective orders and the residence she'd had to share with her assailant.
- Ms. L escaped human trafficking to this country; apprehended and sent to a detention center, American Gateways' volunteer Julie Wimmer won Ms. L's release and lifted her suffering.
- Texas Lawyers for Texas Veterans—Tarrant County Chapter volunteer John Johnson has restored hope to over 100 low-income veterans by addressing warrants, expunctions and nondisclosure orders, and occupational licenses.
- After nine years of her father's abuse, the Texas Advocacy Project secured Claire's emancipation. Overcoming many obstacles, she finished high school and college early, graduated from law school, and is an attorney with a Fortune 100 company.
- After a Fifth Circuit appeal, the Texas Civil Rights Project and volunteers Ralph Miller and Nathan White of Weil, Gotshal &

Manges vindicated a deaf couple denied interpreters while confronting their young daughter's cancer.

- Mission Waco Legal Services volunteer Marcus Brooks obtained a withheld IRS refund on the day his client's family was being evicted, saving them from homelessness.
- A boy whose mother died needed urgent surgery, but his grandmother lacked legal custody to consent; the father refused to consent or give up custody. Jefferson County Bar Association volunteer Michael Lindsay filed for emergency assistance, and obtained the child's medical care, the grandmother's custody, and the father's financial support.
- Volunteering at a Tarrant County Volunteer Attorney Services clinic, Jordan Woody with Shannon, Gracey, Ratliff & Miller arranged housing through the local probation department's resources for a young mother and domestic-violence survivor.
- Santos was 15 when he fled Honduras to escape his mother's cruelty, hoping to find safety with his grandmother. He was apprehended and placed in removal proceedings. Kids in Need of Defense volunteer Katie McEvilly of Baker Botts secured his permanent residency.
- Tahira Merritt and attorneys from Holland & Knight represented Mosaic Family Services when sensitive client data was subpoenaed, thus preventing damaging disclosure.
- At the St. Frances Cabrini Center for Immigrant Legal Assistance, Richard Horstman and René Mouledoux serve Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals and citizenship applicants—many the victims of human trafficking and other abuse; the center helped over 1,000 last year.
- USAA attorney and San Antonio Bar Community Justice Program volunteer John Pawloski stopped a wrongful collection effort against an elderly, indigent, non-English-speaking woman.
- Volunteer Legal Services of Central Texas's Tecuan Flores and Sarah Coleman of Baker Botts prevailed at an imminent eviction trial and on appeal, securing shelter for an elderly, disabled couple.
- Sexually assaulted by her father at three and homeless at eight, Maria fled to her mother in America. South Texas Pro Bono Asylum Representation Project (ProBAR) attorney Adriana Corral stopped deportation proceedings and Maria lives securely with her mother.
- Three children who witnessed their father brutally murder their mother were left traumatized, homeless, and suicidal. Aid to Victims of Domestic Abuse effected adoption and name changes, and provided successful counseling.

My stories limn the darkest and the brightest of our natures. The darkest—greed, cruelty, callousness—are introduced by people from myriad vocations; the brightest—compassion, service, sacrifice—by people from only one. Yours.

Some would say these lawyers are living out the imperatives of our profession. Others that they are experiencing service's uniquely transformative power to convert even the dullest physical activity into the most luminously spiritual one. But still others might say these lawyers with their simple selfless acts ascend all the way to Heaven. To which I'd quietly add:

If not higher.



FRANK STEVENSON
President, State Bar of Texas