

The Pro Bono Spotlight features attorneys chosen by the Texas Access to Justice Commission or the State Bar of Texas for their exceptional commitment to pro bono work. Find pro bono opportunities, support, and inspiration at probonotexas.org.

John CURRIER

JOHN CURRIER PRACTICES LAW IN HOUSTON, WHERE HE FOCUSES ON BUSINESS LAW, WILLS AND PROBATE, COLLECTIONS, PERSONAL INJURY, DIVORCE, AND ADOPTIONS. INSPIRED BY A LAW PROFESSOR, CURRIER HAS APPLIED HIS SKILLS TO ASSIST VULNERABLE PEOPLE WHO WOULD OTHERWISE NOT BE ABLE TO HIRE AN ATTORNEY.

INTERVIEW BY **ERIC QUITUGUA**
PHOTO COURTESY OF JOHN CURRIER



TELL US A LITTLE BIT ABOUT YOURSELF, YOUR UPBRINGING, AND CAREER. WHAT AREA OF LAW DO YOU PRACTICE?

I am a native Texan, but as the son of a U.S. Air Force officer, my family moved around quite a bit growing up. My father's last assignment was at Strategic Air Command Headquarters near Omaha, Nebraska. He retired and became a remedial reading teacher in Omaha. I grew up in Omaha and went to college and law school at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. During my second year in law school, I was getting ready to head for class but could not find my car because it was completely buried in a snowdrift. As I began digging it out, cursing the weather, I realized that I needed to move south. I graduated law school in 1991, got married, and promptly moved back to Texas, earning my law license later that year.

WHEN DID YOU DECIDE TO BECOME A LAWYER?

It is a running joke that I became a lawyer because of chemistry... organic chemistry to be exact. That class made me rethink my plan for medical school. I always knew I wanted to help people and the law seemed like a good vehicle for that goal.

IN WHAT WAYS DID YOUR UPBRINGING SHAPE YOUR LAW CAREER?

My parents placed a great deal of import on education. My brothers and I were expected to go to college and encouraged to get advanced degrees.

HOW DID YOU GET STARTED WITH PRO BONO CASES AND WHY DID YOU TAKE THEM ON?

I had a professor at the University of Nebraska College of Law who emphasized how important it is that we use the skills and training we were receiving to help people. He said that we would be able to make plenty of money in the practice of law and that we should not let money be the guiding force of our lives. I enjoy using my knowledge base to assist those in need of legal help, and I have always felt that it is the right thing to do.

WHAT TYPES OF CASES WERE YOU VOLUNTEERING YOUR TIME ON?

I have a general civil practice and assist pro bono clients on a wide array of cases; however, the vast majority of the pro bono work I do involves probate issues. By its nature, probate cases involve people who have lost loved ones and are reeling emotionally and are sometimes left financially insecure.

HOW DO YOU BALANCE TIME BETWEEN YOUR NORMAL WORKLOAD AND PRO BONO CASES?

There is no set formula. I am fortunate enough to work with my lifelong friend, and we basically do what we want to do as long as we can still pay the bills. As a result, I can take whatever time I need to work my pro bono cases.

WHAT PRO BONO CASE STANDS OUT THE MOST TO YOU?

I have handled hundreds of pro bono cases over the past 30 years, but the one that stands out the most is a probate that I am still working on. My client, an interesting Air Force veteran, passed away a few years back after a long struggle with dementia. His widow really had no idea about the bills, house repair, finances, and the like. There was also quite a bit of family drama involved with her son after her husband died. Unfortunately, the son also recently died of COVID-19 after a long battle with substance use issues. Needless to say, this added to the weight my client has had to deal with. I have been working with her on an almost daily basis to make sure she is emotionally and financially safe. Bad luck seems to follow her constantly; roof problems, plumbing issues, her dog, her truck. When it rains it pours. She doesn't always take my advice, but I try to be there for her no matter what. We have developed a strong bond, and it feels good to know that I am there to help her.

WHY SHOULD NEW ATTORNEYS DO PRO BONO WORK?

It is the right thing to do, and new attorneys can gain valuable experience working pro bono cases. Most local bar associations have volunteer programs. Personally, I got my start taking cases from the Houston Volunteer Lawyers Program, or HVLP. The HVLP provided me with information about various types of law, people to bounce questions off of, and malpractice insurance for the cases they assign. I learned a great deal about many areas of law, without the worry of falling without a net. The experience that I gained working these pro bono cases provided me with a working knowledge of many types of cases that I probably would not have ever learned but for that opportunity, and thereafter, the knowledge I gained directly translated into paying clients seeking my assistance for my entire legal career. After all, what does a lawyer have to sell other than knowledge and experience? **TBJ**

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