

Sharon's Story

The Advantages of a General Practitioner

by Robert L. Flax

My friend Sharon had multiple legal needs, and her story shows the advantages of a general practitioner. Because she turned for help to a small-firm practitioner, she had the flexibility and economy to pursue her rights through many courts over several years. Her attorney could draw on past work and training to represent her in each venue.

Her legal journey began with a show cause. After winning it in circuit court, Sharon defended it in the Virginia Court of Appeals and Supreme Court of Virginia. Her lawyer's experience with workers' compensation appeals helped write the brief, give oral argument, and successfully move to dismiss the Supreme Court appeal.

After remand to the circuit court, Sharon's ex-husband filed bankruptcy to get out of jail. The bankruptcy court referred Sharon to mediation of her objection to discharge. Her attorney's earlier workers' compensation mediations and lectures from the Virginia Trial Lawyers Association and the Virginia Bar Association aided preparation and conduct of the mediation. When mediation failed, the objection was tried in bankruptcy court. Her lawyer's skills, developed in previous objections to student loans and consumer debt, came to bear in Sharon's representation.

After bankruptcy court set the amount owed by the ex-husband, Sharon sued the guarantor of his circuit court appeal bond. Experience with posting appeal bonds in criminal and civil cases helped her general practitioner defend the validity of the appeal bond in the circuit court.

The guarantor filed bankruptcy after being sued. The objection to discharge was settled days before the trial. That settlement proved to be the only substantial payment Sharon received.

Sharon survived on disability benefits. She could not have pursued her cases unless her attorney belonged to a small firm and did not have to answer to anyone but his wife.

Months after her settlement, Sharon was diagnosed with cancer. The last services her lawyer provided to her were a will, medical power of attorney and living will, and helping her niece administer her estate.

Sharon gave her consent to this article before she passed away.

Her legal journey required her lawyer to be familiar with domestic relations, appellate practice, mediation, and bankruptcy. Practice in unrelated fields like workers' compensation and membership in professional organizations such as the Virginia Trial Lawyers Association provided skills to effectively help Sharon.

Sharon's story shows that general practice gave her lawyer the opportunity to learn from dissimilar experiences. Those experiences and the flexibility of a small firm helped her to receive uninterrupted assistance during the abrupt changes in direction of her cases and her life. ☪

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