

# A Pro Bono Challenge

By Robert Cerceo

**T**here are days when I wake in the dark, half dressed with one sock on and pillow lines down my face, wondering whether I am getting up to go to the office or just getting home from it; the clock flashing 12:00 a.m. does little to solve my quandary. A little while later, as I wrestle with the Rainbow Curve, I fantasize about life as one of the many construction workers on the side of the road holding the "Slow" sign—ahhhh, that's the life, no stress. The car in front nearly hitting the worker causes me to radically reconsider my options. As I arrive, the office is buzzing with "I need it right now!" Can I get to my desk without being noticed? And so begins another day.

However, there are times when all the forces of nature come together and the cases go as they should: children are delivered safely to the proper caretakers, squandered funds are restored to the out-spouse and domestic violence is dealt with squarely. At those times, especially to the indigent *pro bono* clients, we must seem as all powerful merchants of fate. Little do they know that a few hours ago I had trouble deciding whether the sock was going on or off.

With little doubt, the most satisfying moments are when I can help clients in need with the art and craft of our practice. One such case was a divorce action with client Mom, a mother of three small children. The case was referred through the CCLS and UNLV mentoring program. The UNLV student performed well; she has since moved to a new firm and is off to a great career.

Unfortunately, given the level of domestic violence by Dad, yet still trying to balance the desires of our well-intentioned client to promote co-parenting, the case took a long path. Extensive motion practice became necessary, and, eventually, the matter settled at the start of trial. We worked hard to bring the parties to the table, applied detailed motion practice where necessary, prepared for trial and the result met with the client's litigation goals.

The real reward was not only in a job well done, but in the lives improved by genuine efforts to help. Mom communicated the following in appreciation for the handling of the case:

I know that I have said thank you to you many times, but I just can't say it enough for all that you have done for me over the last two years. You have truly been an angel to my family. You have brought me back to reality when I needed it. You helped me believe in myself, and stay strong. You helped me see that it wasn't my fault, and I simply did the best I could. When I doubted myself most and had no one else to give me that support, you were there to give it to me. You never turned your back on me and never gave me any reason to doubt or question you. I'll never forget what a great person you have been to me and my children. How you took us under your wing and treated me no differently than any other clients you have who pay big dollars to utilize you. I always said that you took care of me like a father would his daughter. Just know that in a way I may not be able to explain, you have given me back so much confidence in myself, and I know now that I am a good mom, and that I was a good wife.

Kudos of this level are rare in a family law practice, and I share in the success with our firm, CCLS and UNLV. So the next time I struggle with the direction of my REM cycle, I know that it will all work out as I help the next client "down the road." **G**

An associate with the Willick Law Group, Mr. Cerceo's practice deals with all aspects of heavily contested family law proceedings. He is a frequent lecturer on domestic relations and board member for the Senior Citizens Law Project and the Family Court Outsource Mediation Committee. Mr. Cerceo also participates as a pro tem hearing master for the Truancy Court and Judge Hardcastle's Truancy Diversion Program.

For more information about the Clark County Pro Bono Project or to volunteer to take a pro bono case, contact Pro Bono Director Kimberly Mucha at (702) 386-1070, ext. 137 or [kmucha@clarkcountylegal.com](mailto:kmucha@clarkcountylegal.com).

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