

The ATJ Pro Bono Champion is a quarterly feature highlighting the work of an attorney chosen by the Texas Access to Justice Commission. To learn more about pro bono work in Texas or to get involved, go to probonotexas.org.

Richard DANYSH

RICHARD DANYSH, OF COUNSEL TO BRACEWELL IN SAN ANTONIO, ATTRIBUTES HIS SENSE OF GIVING BACK TO HIS CATHOLIC UPBRINGING. SPURRED BY HIS EXPERIENCE WORKING PART TIME FOR BEXAR COUNTY LEGAL AID & PRO BONO SERVICES, HE FOCUSED HIS PRO BONO EFFORTS ON IMMIGRATION LAW.

INTERVIEW BY **ERIC QUITUGUA**
PHOTO BY **GITTINGS**



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

I am a civil trial lawyer in private practice in Bracewell's San Antonio office. Over the course of my 40-plus-year career, I have tried quite a number of jury trials mostly representing commercial clients. I was born and raised in San Antonio and attended Catholic elementary and high schools, where there was a constant emphasis on helping those less fortunate than oneself. The importance of giving back to the community is something that has stayed with me. I earned my undergraduate degree at Tulane University and attended law school at St. Mary's University School of Law.

IN WHAT WAYS DID YOUR UPBRINGING SHAPE YOUR LAW CAREER?

I grew up and was educated in a fairly diverse part of our community, where social and racial distinctions were less common than elsewhere. I like to think this gave me a tolerant view of our community, our nation, and the world.

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

During my second year of law school, I worked part time for Bexar County Legal Aid in an impoverished community in San Antonio. Although this wasn't pro bono work, I saw firsthand how the poor and underprivileged had little or no access to legal services despite having legitimate legal claims or defenses. I have to admit that during much of my career I did little to act on what I had seen, but the experience never left me. I finally acted on it and wish I had done so earlier.

WHAT TYPES OF CASES WERE YOU VOLUNTEERING YOUR TIME ON?

I began taking on pro bono cases for the Community Justice Program of the San Antonio Bar Association, mostly in the areas of family law. The need I saw while in law school was still there, and I wanted to help out. I eventually began to devote more time to pro bono efforts by taking on responsibilities as a pro bono mediator for the Bexar County Dispute Resolution Center and becoming involved in pro bono immigration work. The immigration work included intake work at the Dilley detention facility, making presentations to local bar associations to recruit lawyers to take on immigration work, trying to establish a network of pro bono translators to help the pro bono non-Spanish speakers (like me), and actual casework. I have also taught at trial academies sponsored by the American College of Trial Lawyers and the Texas Access to Justice Commission, teaching young lawyers working for nonprofits basic trial and advocacy skills.

WHAT PRO BONO CASE STANDS OUT THE MOST TO YOU?

An immigration case in which I represented a young woman from Mexico in her late teens and early 20s who was seeking asylum or protection from removal after a series of horrific events suffered at the hands of one of Mexico's cartels. The cartel murdered her husband, brother-in-law, and 5-year-old daughter. After escaping, she sat in a detention center for almost a year waiting for her case to be heard. By the time I took the case, deadlines were tight. Getting evidence out of Mexico was challenging. The legal standards were in flux and changing—and not in my client's favor. The case was tried before a San Antonio immigration judge. We put on a credible case. The court acknowledged the horrible things experienced by the client but denied her relief, claiming we did not prove that the cartel would do it again if she returned to Mexico. It was a confounding and illogical conclusion requiring an unrealistic and incredibly high standard. In the end, my client was deported. It was extremely disappointing.

WHAT DID YOU TAKE AWAY FROM THE EXPERIENCE?

These individuals genuinely need legal help. They are in a different country, largely to find a new and better life for their families, with limited or no language skills trying to navigate their way through an already complex and increasingly hostile immigration system with limited resources. I have also had the opportunity to meet and work with an incredibly diverse, talented, and dedicated group of lawyers, assistants, professionals, social workers, and volunteers whom I otherwise would have never met. That experience has truly enriched my life.

WHY SHOULD NEW ATTORNEYS DO PRO BONO WORK?

First, because there is such a need. So many individuals have legal problems and cannot afford lawyers. Second, pro bono work is the essence of client service. These clients really need help and do not have the resources to get that help. Third, practicing law is a privilege. Lawyers should give back to the legal system and our communities for that privilege with pro bono services. Finally, it is very fulfilling and satisfying to know that you helped a client solve a problem that otherwise may not have been resolved. **TBJ**