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From the President:
The Benefits of Kindness
and Compassion

2019 Legislative Review

We Salute Our
Pro Bono All-Stars

2019 Fiction Competition
Winner: The Incident
at Gulf Shores

THE LEGAL

Behavioral Economics and the Practice of Law

Honoring Georgia's Lawyers

I sincerely hope the Commission on Professionalism's work will honor Georgia's lawyers for what they do each day and will help each lawyer to become consummate professionals while they do the tireless and often thankless work of representing clients.

BY KARLISE Y. GRIER

In June of 2018, I was shaken to the core when I learned of the death of attorney Antonio Mari. I did not personally know Mari, a family law attorney who was murdered by a client's ex-husband. I had, however, as a former family law attorney of almost 18 years, personally experienced the dynamics that caused his death: enmity, anger, retribution and a myriad of other vitriolic emotions directed at you as a lawyer (by opposing parties or clients) because you are striving to do your job to the best of your ability. I wanted to take a moment in this article to pay tribute to Mari and to honor the thousands of other Georgia lawyers who are just like him, men and women who toil in the trenches every day—putting their clients interests above their own personal well-being—as they strive to provide exemplary service and excellent representation. I also wanted to commend the wonderful professionalism example set by the Bartow County Bar Association, which stepped up in the midst of this horrible tragedy to divide up and take Mari's cases and to help close down his law practice.¹



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According to the *Daily Report*, Mari was afraid of the pro se opposing party who ultimately killed him.² Nevertheless, Mari fulfilled his legal obligations to his client and obtained a final divorce decree for the client less than two hours before his client's ex-husband shot him to death. This balance of client interests versus personal interests is not always played out as dramatically as in Mari's case, but it is always there. Do you go to your child's soccer practice or do you first finish the brief that is due tomorrow? Do you take time to go for a walk or a run or do you take that early morning meeting with a client who can't take time off from their work as an hourly employee? Do you tell the pro bono client you are meeting with they have to leave your office and reschedule (knowing they most likely won't) because they reek of cigarette smoke and you have asthma? Do you file a motion to withdraw well in advance of trial or do you take the chance the client will pay you "in installments" as promised, knowing the client really needs a lawyer in this custody battle?

Each day, Georgia lawyers are called upon to make choices, large and small, that force them to balance their personal well-being against the interests of their clients. Striking the "correct" balance is at the heart of what we call "professionalism."³ One of the first quotes I came across when I started as executive director of the Chief Justice's Commission on Professionalism was from Karl N. Llewellyn, a jurisprudential scholar who taught at Yale, Columbia and the University of Chicago Law Schools. Prof. Llewellyn cautioned his students:

The lawyer is a [person] of many conflicts. More than anyone else in our society, he [or she] must contend with competing claims on his [or her] time

and loyalty. You must represent your client to the best of your ability, and yet never lose sight of the fact that you are an officer of the court with a special responsibility for the integrity of the legal system. You will often find, brethren and sistern, that those professional duties do not sit easily with one another. You will discover, too, that they get in the way of your other obligations—to your conscience, your God, your family, your partners, your country and all the other perfectly good claims on your energies and hearts. You will be pulled and tugged in a dozen directions at once. You must learn to handle those conflicts.⁴

I hope that, under my stewardship, the Chief Justice's Commission on Professionalism will honor Georgia's lawyers by ensuring CLE providers offer outstanding programming regarding professionalism concepts that give lawyers the opportunity to discuss the challenges (and sometimes joys) of practicing law. I look forward to continuing to recognize the amazing community service work of lawyers and judges at the Justice Robert Benham Awards for Community Service. I hope that the Commission's convocations, such as the 2018 Convocation on Professionalism and the Global Community, will continue to explore cutting-edge issues in the legal profession. I hope the Commission's work will help to embolden lawyers to stand courageously for the rule of law in our country and to provide guidance to lawyers on how to do so thoughtfully and with integrity. I look forward to the Commission's continued partnership with the State Bar of Georgia Committee on Professionalism and with Georgia's law schools as we strive to introduce law students to professionalism concepts during the Law School Orientations on Professionalism.

Too often, I think our profession focuses on the "bad" things for which lawyers may be known. I truly believe most lawyers are good, hard working men and women who want to do the best job they can for their clients in return for fair payment for their work. During my stewardship as executive director of the Commission, it is my goal to focus on and cultivate the good and the goodness in our profession that often happens without notice or comment. I am eager to help us all (myself included) grow to be the best professionals we can be. I sincerely hope the Commission's work will honor Georgia's lawyers for what they do each day and will help each lawyer to become consummate professionals while they do the tireless and often thankless work of representing clients. ●



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Endnotes

1. See R. Robin McDonald, *Cartersville Attorney Gunned Down by Client's Ex-Husband*, *Daily Report*, June 22, 2018, at 1, <https://www.law.com/dailyreportonline/2018/06/21/cartersville-attorney-gunned-down-by-clients-ex-husband/> (last visited June 22, 2018).
2. See *Id.*
3. To learn more about how Georgia defines professionalism, see *A Lawyer's Creed* and the *Aspirational Statement on Professionalism* at: <http://cjcpga.org/lawyers-creed/> (last visited August 10, 2018).
4. Mary Ann Glendon, *A Nation Under Lawyers* 17 (1994).