

Guardians Spotlight:

Jennifer Coughlin Sets the Stage for Victims Rights in the Social Media Age

For a relatively “new” lawyer, Jennifer Coughlin has become a rising star in the legal community due to her heart-felt dedication to her clients and true gratitude for her mentors who have paved the way. Her natural compassion for each client’s story is her gift. Her skill at leading the charge to hold wrong-doers accountable has led to some noteworthy attention on a national scale.

In October 2012, the TODAY show ran a compelling story about Coughlin and her client, a victim of a brutal rape and assault in Bend. What turned national attention to the case were the brash demands from seasoned defense attorney Stephen Houze, for all of the victims computer search engine records – from Google searches, to private emails and written journal entries from post-rape counseling sessions. Coughlin and her client stood up against the subpoenas and risked being held in contempt of court. The perpetrator was sentenced to 25 years in prison and Coughlin set precedent regarding victims’ constitutional privacy rights.

Coughlin grew up in Baker City, Oregon and moved to Bend in 1994 to attend Sunriver Preparatory School. She left Oregon to attend Colby College in Maine and returned for law school at Lewis and Clark College Northwestern School of Law. In 2006, after passing the bar, she returned to Bend to practice law. Now a partner at Brothers Hawn and Coughlin LLP, her civil litigation practice focuses on all types of personal injury. She enjoys assisting clients throughout difficult periods of their lives when they have been harmed by the actions of others.

In addition to her service standing up for injured clients, Coughlin also enjoys being an active member of the Bend community. She is currently the Chair of the Board of Big Brothers/Big Sisters of Central Oregon, has served on the Oregon State Bar Pro Bono Committee and enjoys volunteering at the Deschutes Historical Society. When not at the office, she



Jennifer Coughlin

can be found mountain biking, skiing or hiking around beautiful Central Oregon.

My work life has changed in the last year because:

I’ve become more accustomed to being a small business owner, rather than just a lawyer. With that comes so many more responsibilities and stresses, but is also wonderful and exciting. I find myself being a lot more

I take advocacy for those who have been victims of sexual abuse and assault very seriously. These victims are fragile and brave at the same time.

social, when normally I would just want to curl up on the couch and read a book after work. Although, I still do plenty of that!

My work life has also changed because of the opportunities and education that have come from my appearance on the TODAY show with my client, Jennifer Bennett. She’s a tremendously strong young woman who has withstood all the blame and shame that comes with being a rape victim, and has persevered. It’s wonderful that the TODAY show and other national media outlets have picked up on this case. It sends a strong message that more people need

to be aware of: stop the re-victimization of those who are brave enough to come forward to report this heinous crime.

The opportunities I see from that change are:

Building meaningful relationships with people in the community who get to know me as a person and can then determine if I will be a good fit to be their advocate. I take advocacy for those who have been victims of sexual abuse and assault very seriously. These victims are fragile and brave at the same time. I am still learning the best way to handle them with grace and courage.

The best thing about my job is:

Getting to help people. For instance, I know that getting PIP wage loss for a single mother who’s been injured in a car accident can put food on the table for her children. In today’s economy many clients’ wage loss claims have become convoluted and difficult for adjusters to understand. I gather all the paperwork for the adjuster so that my clients can focus on healing while they are still receiving income. I’m amazed at the number of clients who come to me and

have never been told about PIP wage loss from their own insurance company!

The hardest thing about my job is:

Wrongful death claims. A widow dropped off photos of her husband of 50 years about a month ago. It wasn’t until late last Friday night that I could actually take out the photos to look at the memories the couple had created. It made me so emotional, knowing that he was taken from her and their beautiful children unnecessarily early.

When I was a new lawyer, I wish I knew:

Aren’t I still a new lawyer?!?! Ask questions, even when a senior lawyer acts as though you should know something. Don’t pretend that you know

GUARDIAN *continued from page 4*

and then do a poor job. If your work product lets someone down those relationships are difficult to rebuild.

Growing up I thought I would become:

A marine biologist. But then my dad told me it wasn't just swimming around with dolphins all day, but rather sitting in a lab dissecting things. I got over that dream pretty quickly.

Why I give to The Guardians of Civil Justice program:

It funds the people who act on our clients' behalf in the legislature. I don't have the energy or interest to do so. I'm glad that there are people out there willing to do it! I can't even imagine what would happen if insurance companies didn't have to stand up to us!

What I'd like colleagues to know about OTLA is:

The mentoring is amazing. I feel so fortunate that I can write a question on the list serv and receive a meaningful, knowledgeable answer within an hour or a minute! If I were on my own, the list serv would be invaluable. Thankfully, my partners also serve as my mentors and I am incredibly grateful to them as well.

There's more to life than my job. My favorite activities are:

Living the Central Oregon lifestyle with my husband and dogs, which sounds like a complete cliché but is absolutely true. I enjoy mountain and road bike riding right from my house. Or I can go snowshoeing, skating or skiing within a half hour from my office.

I knew I was grown up when:

I had graduated from college and was traveling the world with no idea what I wanted to do. After a few months of bumming around Europe, I met up with my parents, who were



Left to right: Bruce Brothers, Guardian Jen Coughlin & Wayne Hawn.

vacationing in Italy. My mom suggested that perhaps I follow in my grandfather and father's footsteps and go to law school. It sounded like a very grown up thing to do and I'm so glad I took her advice!

I'm proudest of:

Being chosen by an incredibly talented and respected lawyer to join as his partner despite my youth. Bruce Brothers had faith in my abilities more than I think I had in myself. He's given me the opportunity to rise to the task and try to live up to his expectations. I feel so incredibly fortunate that he believed in me.

Most influential person in my life:

My dad. I grew up in his law firm. I would walk there after school every day and be immersed in a thriving law firm. I respect his work ethic and his powerful, aggressive advocacy. He's a well-respected member of the community in Baker City. He taught me that being a lawyer in a small town means

being accountable and treating each client with respect and dignity.

Favorite fictional character:

Dagny Taggart, from Atlas Shrugged (favorite book as well!)

What was it like to be on the TODAY show?

It was a tremendous opportunity to get my client's very powerful message across in a national format. The TODAY show producers were so kind...they flew us out first class, and even bought a ticket for my client's best friend for emotional support. We stayed at a fabulous hotel overlooking Central Park. We had a driver to take us around Manhattan or to the studio whenever we wanted. The show is such a well-oiled machine; it didn't stress us out or feel rushed in any way. Matt Lauer and Savannah Guthrie were so positive and supportive of Jennifer's case and especially sensitive to the privacy issues that we were facing at the time in the case.

OTLA Workers' Compensation Spring CLE

**Saturday March 2nd
Kells Irish Restaurant & Pub**

8:30 AM – 3:15 PM

112 SW Second Ave. – Portland

To register contact:

Christina Hersey: 503-223-5587 or christina@oregontriallawyers.org

