

Just a Danged Ol' Lawsuit

By Chris Davis

A new crop of lawyers took the Oath of Attorney Sept. 24, 2014. As I enter my 20th year of practice, I am nostalgic — reflecting back upon mentors and experiences that have shaped my practice. I have been influenced by many wonderful elder lawyers over the years, but one experience I had stands out.

I was a young lawyer and had just been assigned to defend a small, regional trucking company in a lawsuit filed in the Eastern District of Oklahoma. The plaintiffs were a husband and wife who had been traveling on a local highway and had been hit by a driver for my client. The driver was simply not paying attention. The plaintiffs were nice people. I had no real defenses. I was nervous; I felt the stakes were high. I was searching for a meaningful defense but was coming up short. Worse for me yet was the lawyer on the other side was a past president of the Oklahoma Bar Association who just happened to be from the same neck of the woods as the plaintiffs, Doug Sanders.

"You can call me Dougal," he said as he invited me to his office in Poteau. We discussed the case. We talked about depositions, discovery, medical records and all the things you talk about in a case in federal court. I immediately liked Dougal. He was firm, but fair. He had already put together a good case before he had filed the law-

suit. But somewhere in my effort to be clever, I had made a couple of missteps in the defense strategy of the case. Probably like a lot of younger lawyers, I pushed the envelope a bit. I was brash and a bit too aggressive at times. Even-



tually, I had my client admit liability, and we wound up in a settlement conference where the parties were able to reach an agreement.

In the days that followed, my conscience was bothering me. I was worried about how I had conducted myself in the eyes of a person so accomplished as the bar association past president. It mattered to me what Dougal thought. I wanted a good reputation of being fair and playing by the rules. I got really worked up and was stressed out about it. So I called him. He listened, quietly

and respectfully. I must have rambled and stammered in the call. Finally Dougal said, "Chris, it's just a dangled ol' lawsuit." He then took time to explain that as important as these cases are, they are not our lives. They are not our spouses, our children, our health or our friends.

These cases and these matters are our profession, and we should strive to perform with excellence, but always tempered with integrity and civility. Keep things in context.

I have never forgotten his words of wisdom. That was at least 10 years ago. When I am struggling in a case and wonder if I should be washing cars somewhere instead of being a lawyer, I remember "it's just a dangled ol' lawsuit." When I am up and may have accomplished an important result in a matter, rather than take it too seriously and get all puffed up, I think "it's just a dangled ol' lawsuit." Whether

up or down in a case (as it important as it is), your life is your life and work is only work — and the case you are stressed out about will forever be "just a dangled 'ol lawsuit."

Next time you are in southeast Oklahoma, think of Doug Sanders — and all the elder lawyers who deposited something in your life. And when you are feeling stressed about a particular matter, recall the teachings of the sage of Poteau, "It's just a dangled ol' lawsuit."

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