

BLOOMA STARK

Relishing the Human Element in Trusts, Wills, and Estates

by Stephen Donnelly

Blooma Stark was a non-traditional student before the phrase “non-traditional student” entered popular culture.

Commuting five hours round-trip to and from Northwestern University Law School each day, Stark focused on the increased time she had to study instead of the additional hardship it added to her life as a mother of two. None of her success, she points out, would have been possible without the unwavering support of her husband of 45 years.

“If you ask my husband, those were some of the best years of his life because he got to interact with the children more than most fathers did at that time,” recalls Stark, proving the “glass half full” mentality was common in the Stark household.

Born in war-torn Poland shortly after World

After a lengthy career, Stark genuinely enjoys coming into work every day. “After all these years, I’m not jaded at all. I still love my job.”

Calculated Risk Pays Off

For Stark, law school was a calculated risk, a risk she and the countless clients she has counseled over her career are glad she took. Beginning as early as her decision to go to college, Stark planned for every possible setback. While she intended to use her college degree as a stepping stone to earn a law degree, Stark chose to study accounting because of its practicality.

“I had a family to consider,” Stark says. If she couldn’t pursue her law degree, she knew that she could fall back on her accounting degree. Passing her CPA exam before graduating from Northern Illinois University was additional

In preparing for law school, Stark did not have many resources from which to draw. With no legal predecessors, she did know one thing: “I knew I could not apply to out-of-town schools because my family was in Chicago.”

Luckily, Stark was accepted into each school to which she applied, and she ultimately selected Northwestern University.

With two small children, Stark went from having to schedule classes around a daycare provider for her son while she was in college to juggling her motherly responsibilities while in law. After her first year at Northwestern, Stark had more control over her schedule and began scheduling her full course load to three days a week. “I saved ten hours a week commuting.”

Stark and her husband’s higher education example did not go unnoticed by their children. “I think it had a profound impact on my children,” she says. “It made them see if you want to succeed you have to work hard. In our house, there was no question the kids would go to college and probably graduate school.”

One of Stark’s favorite stories is when she overheard her daughter talking with a friend while playing together. “My daughter couldn’t have been more than 8 or 9 years old.”

Stark overheard the girls discussing what they wanted to do after high school. Her daughter’s friend explained she wanted to be a manicurist because she liked nails. “My daughter said, ‘I’ll be studying for the SATs so I can get into a good college!’”

Drawn to Estate Planning

Stark wanted to focus on tax law because it came easy to her. She had her first job at age 8 when an elderly neighbor in Montreal offered her a job as his bookkeeper. He taught her double entry account keeping and paid her a nickel an hour. Her first accounting course was more of a refresher; she recalls sitting in class thinking, “I know this; I’ve done this from the time I was 8 years old.”

At Northwestern, Stark quickly learned that the difference between law and accounting at the academic level was that a question in law could have multiple correct answers. She vividly remembers her contracts professor reading an exemplary exam answer to her first-year class, an answer that was completely different from hers despite the fact that she earned an A-plus in the class. Stark realized



War II ended, Stark moved to Israel at the age 3. At age 5, Stark and her family moved from Israel to Montreal where they settled for the next 14 years until she married and moved to Maryland. Stark has some family in Canada, New York, and cousins she sees regularly in Israel, but none in Poland. “The Nazis took care of that,” she explains solemnly.

Focusing on the opportunities available to her, Stark has forged an incredibly successful career as a renowned estate and tax planner at **Aronberg Goldgehn Davis & Garmisa**. She also prides herself on her family, her craft, and her volunteer work with several Jewish charities.

insurance for Stark and her family.

Not only was pursuing higher education a calculated risk for Stark, so was deciding which school to attend. After about three years in Maryland and the birth of their first child, a girl, Stark’s husband received a job in the Chicago-land area and the two settled in Bristol. Stark would soon give birth to their second child, a boy. The location allowed her husband to be close to work and was 35 miles from Northern Illinois University, which happened to be the most logical place for Stark to pursue her degree. “It was the nearest large school,” she explains.

that while the end result might vary, what mattered was how you arrived at the answer.

Stark discovered estate planning after her second year at Northwestern while serving as a summer associate at McDermott, Will, and Emery.

While rotating between different divisions within the firm, Stark found herself drawn to the estate planning section. “I liked it the best,” she says. “It combined human interaction and tax—it had both!”

From this experience, Stark knew what she wanted to do for her career.

Not only did estate planning combine human interaction and tax, it also provided a slightly more predictable schedule so she could spend time with her family. Plus, it was more transparent than litigation. In her limited experience with litigation, Stark was less than thrilled with the amount of gamesmanship involved. “There are so many maneuvers the litigators do that just bury you in paper and make the outcome unpredictable,” says Stark.

After law school, Stark worked at McDermott, Will, and Emery for a few years, gaining valuable experience until moving to Rosenthal and Schanfield, where she practiced for the next 18 years dealing directly with clients on a daily basis.

After Rosenthal disbanded, Stark began working at Aronberg Goldgehn Davis & Garmisa, where she continues to enjoy the human element in her practice.

No-Nonsense Approach

Stark prefers ensuring her clients avoid litigation altogether by working diligently and anticipating every possible scenario. Stark leaves a strong impression on her clients such as Christine Jacobek, who has worked with Stark on challenging legal issues spanning 20 years. Stark rises to the challenge every time.

“Blooma takes a no-nonsense approach. She’s on top of her game and dedicated to detail and following through on the issues. When she says she will do something, it’s done,” says Jacobek. “She maintains an atmosphere of calm and kindness while tenaciously and very effectively working on the legal issues that brought me in.”

Stark’s ability to explain the most complex areas of family matters, estate planning, and trust administration left Jacobek confident that she has the right lawyer. “For me, Blooma Stark is the very best,” says Jacobek.

Her colleagues echo that sentiment. Henry Morris has practiced law for more than 50 years and has practiced alongside Stark for more than 25 years.

“I have not come across a finer estate and

trust law attorney than Blooma Stark,” says Morris, who is also impressed by Stark’s “extreme intelligence, her attentiveness to the needs of her clients as well as those lawyers she practices with, and, most importantly, her unsurpassed excellence in her fields of law with all of their nuances.”

Stark took all of her life experiences and transformed them into a vehicle to serve her clients and her craft. She prides herself on her accessibility—figuratively and literally. Stark’s ability to clearly explain complex legal matters is magnified by her sensitivity to her clients’ need to have a counselor with whom they can constantly communicate.

When providing advice for those considering a career in law, Stark offers the type of response her clients and colleagues have come to expect: an honest and straightforward answer. “It’s not for everybody. I was lucky; I got to do what I love. And I still love it. Love what you do.” ■