

After 9 Years, AILA Clinic Volunteer's Client is a US Citizen



It took more than 9 years, but finally, F became a US citizen.

F, a 49-year-old woman originally from Pakistan, has been living in the U.S. for more than 20 years as a lawful permanent resident. Seven years after she first applied for

U.S. citizenship in 2007, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security denied her application due to supposed inconsistencies in her personal history and testimony related to her marital status.

Unsure of what to do on her own, F visited CVLS' American Immigration Lawyers Association Legal Clinic where volunteer **Rich Hanus** took her case and began working on her appeal.

After a while, Rich discovered why his client's versions of her marital status were

"inconsistent" – F herself was unsure of her marital status.

While in fact F had never been legally married, there had been two occasions where extended family members sought to arrange a marriage for her. One instance involved an actual ceremony in Pakistan, the other just the signing of paperwork. Although neither led to a legal marriage, family members told her the marriages were valid, so F thought maybe they were.

Eventually, she realized they were not valid, but her presentation of this history came off as evasive and inconsistent, especially during aggressive follow-up interviews with DHS officials. DHS denied her application because officials concluded she misrepresented her marital history and, therefore, did not possess the requisite "good moral character" for naturalization.

Rich advocated steadily on F's behalf for two years until he won her appeal. He convinced DHS officials that his client's inconsistencies were innocent and immaterial misunderstandings of the true legal nature of the "arranged marriage" events.

While F was effusively appreciative throughout the process, she celebrated her victory by sending Rich a photo of herself at the ceremony where she took her oath of citizenship.

A Rough Patch Leads Client to CVLS, Then to an Affordable Home

Tamera had a rough two years.

In that time, she was diagnosed with lupus, spent all of her sick and vacation time for health related time off, took two medical leaves of absence, paid \$6,000 to repair a hole in her roof, and totaled her car.

She was in dire financial straits and of course, in foreclosure. But, help was on the way.

The Honorable Anna Loftus sent Tamera into the Circuit Court of Cook County Mortgage

Foreclosure Mediation Program, and appointed CVLS to represent her. Volunteer attorney **Cecelia Blue** was up to the challenge and took the case.

Cecelia helped Tamera weigh her options and consider the toll the foreclosure was taking on her health. Tamera ultimately decided it was best to leave her home.

Cecelia then worked diligently on a cash-for-keys dignified exit option. As she pushed for the best possible deal for her client, the bank suddenly offered Tamera a loan modification that was actually affordable.

Because Cecelia kept pushing the bank and fighting for her client, Tamera is at home, worry free.

CVLS is Family: Helen & Joshua Sigman



CVLS is such a tight-knit community of friends, volunteers, staff and supporters, we like to call the organization a family. But some members of our community are even closer than that – they are literally family! In our “CVLS is Family” series, we’ll talk to a few family members about their connections with CVLS and the Chicago legal community.

The family law practice of Helen Sigman and Associates, run by the mother-and-son team of **Helen and Joshua Sigman**, has benefited both its own clients, and those of CVLS, for years. Helen’s involvement goes back as far as Race Judicata; when she joined the Board of Directors, she helped create the event that would become CVLS’ signature fundraiser.

Helen had just left her position as a Staff Attorney at the Legal Aid Bureau at Metropolitan Family Services, and struck out on her own to begin a private practice. She remembers feeling apprehensive about the idea of a 5K because of the significant associated expenses. As it turned out, the Race was a success, as was Helen’s time on the board. Since then her volunteerism and support of CVLS in so many ways has inspired many people, but one in particular: her son, Josh.

“I always respected, was proud and a bit in awe of what my mother did,” Josh says, but he didn’t always think he would follow in her footsteps. After graduating with a degree in English Literature he wanted to use his love of language to make a difference, so he took the LSAT – “and the rest is history.”

Josh, aware from a young age of CVLS through Helen’s involvement, says her devotion

to legal aid left an impression on him. When he graduated from law school, Josh says he “was looking for a volunteer experience that I knew was well respected, and provided Chicagoans with legal services that truly mattered in their lives.” He realized CVLS was a perfect fit, and started taking on family law cases while working alongside Helen. He eventually joined CVLS’ Junior Board.

“Because we are very similar people, our manner of practicing law aligns perfectly well and we have an allied front on our care for clients,” Josh says. “I believe that clients like that as well.”

Helen Sigman and Associates handles domestic relations and family law matters, so Helen and Josh chiefly take on family law cases through CVLS.

One memorable case for Helen involved representing a woman petitioning for guardianship of an elderly woman. Helen successfully obtained the guardianship for her client, and later learned that, many years before, the elderly woman herself had gone to court to obtain a guardianship – of Helen’s client, who was then a child!

More recently, Helen completed a contentious, years-long guardianship case for a child with severe medical problems. “It was extremely satisfying to obtain plenary guardianship for a woman who had taken such excellent care of the child,” Helen says.

Cases like these remind both Josh and Helen of why they practice pro bono. “It provides those who need legal representation with resources they otherwise don’t have access to and provides the attorney with valuable experience and expertise,” Josh says.

“I think it illustrates how we, as volunteer attorneys, have the ability to profoundly help someone,” Helen says. “As much acrimony we as attorneys deal with, we need to remind ourselves of the power we have to help someone that needs our help.”

And what an enormous help this duo has been. Thank you Josh and Helen for your advocacy on behalf of CVLS and those we serve!

Case in Point: Josh Sigman

Volunteer and Junior Board member **Joshua Sigman** has taken on many cases and changed many lives through his work with CVLS, but one in particular stands out to him. We'll let him tell the story in his own words:

"We represented a woman in a guardianship of a minor case. We eventually got her guardianship of the little boy, who had special needs. The case proceeded over about four years, and during that time we came to know her and the child, although we never met him.

Then a couple of years later I attended the wedding of a good friend's brother. When I met his family, I recognized our client, and she recognized me. Surprised, she asked, "what are you doing at my brother's wedding?"

Suffice to say it was an overwhelming feeling, seeing her and finally meeting the young little boy in a very joyous occasion. I got to see him running around with his cousins (in law). I also got to meet other members of the family, not only as the good friend of their son, but also as the lawyer who helped their daughter get guardianship of the boy she had cared for devotedly for years.

The experience of seeing my client with her family in a normal and very happy situation was just amazing. I hope that every CVLS attorney can imagine the joy in their clients' lives—among their family and friends--upon successful resolutions of their cases, even if they don't get to see it with their own eyes as I did."

Volunteer's Negotiations Help Client

When Linus' company downsized and laid him off, he and his wife Erika had a difficult time making their monthly mortgage payments. While he was unemployed, they used up their savings trying to stay in their home. Ultimately it just wasn't enough and they found themselves in foreclosure. By this point, Linus had started a new job, but they were too far behind to avoid court action.

New Job, Newly Affordable Mortgage

Sometimes, all someone needs is time to get back on his feet.

Larry is a hard working single man who owned his own house. When he lost his job in 2011, he did everything he could to pay his bills and keep his home.

He used all his savings, managed on unemployment, worked temp jobs and he applied, applied, and applied for a new job. After nearly five years and two denials from his bank to modify his mortgage, he got a job.

Despite finally finding a job, the last five years had taken a toll. Larry's home was in foreclosure.

When the bank denied his request for a loan modification, the Honorable Allen Walker sent him into the Circuit Court of Cook County Mortgage Foreclosure Mediation Program, at which point volunteer attorney **Jody Rosenbaum** took his case.

Finally, Larry was represented by a caring, experienced attorney. Thanks to Jody's legal knowledge and her advocacy, Larry was able to show that his financial situation had changed.

This time, the bank offered him an affordable loan modification and he was able to keep the home he'd worked so hard for.

That's when volunteer **Matthew Ingram** stepped in to negotiate a repayment plan. He showed the bank that Linus's employment status had changed, and convinced them to allow Linus and Erika to pay back their missed payments and interest, and get back on track with their monthly mortgage payments.

Thanks to Matthew, Linus and Erika will be able to enjoy their family home for years to come!

Upcoming CVLS Events

GAL for Minors | Common Mental Health Concerns with Court-Involved Adults

Thursday, March 17

CVLS Offices, 12:15 PM

- Presented by Christopher Zacny,
The Chicago School of
Professional Psychology

CVLS is pleased to bring back our CLE partnership with The Chicago School of Professional Psychology, for a series of six seminars held on the third Thursday of each month through July at CVLS.

In "Common Mental Health Concerns with Court-Involved Adults," Doctoral Intern Christopher Zacny will discuss how substance abuse, trauma and major depression can affect adults involved in guardianship cases.

C-O-N-T-E-M-P-T: What Contempt of Court Means to Family Law

Thursday, March 24

Ropes & Gray, 191 N. Wacker Dr.

12:00 PM

- Presented by Josua Sigman,
Helen Sigman and Associates
CVLS Junior Board of Directors

What is Contempt of Court? How can an attorney hold someone in contempt, or avoid being held in contempt? Joshua Sigman, will examine Contempt and its role in Family Law matters. In his presentation, Josh will explore the process of enforcing the court's judgment and orders.

Eviction Series | Part One: Eviction Basics

Wednesday, April 13

CVLS Offices, 12:15 PM

We will cover the fundamentals of housing law: what is a lease, how to terminate the lease, potential defenses and counterclaims, and the sources of various tenant protections.

Eviction Series | Part Two: Eviction Practice

Wednesday, May 11

CVLS Offices, 12:15 PM

We will cover the mechanics: The requirements for a valid termination notice, filing an eviction case, discovery and motion practice issues, conducting a trial, and how to enforce an order of possession.

-- TRAININGS --

New Volunteer Orientations

CVLS Offices, 12:15 PM

- Thursday, March 10

- Thursday, April 14

We'll cover the skills required to be a successful volunteer attorney, as well as the issues that may come up during cases. Training is for new volunteers working with CVLS.

Please visit www.cvls.org/cle to register for a seminar!

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