



Alabama Law Scholarly Commons

Articles

Faculty Scholarship

2023

The VLP and a Tractor

Pamela Pierson

University of Alabama School of Law, ppierson@law.ua.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarship.law.ua.edu/fac_articles

Recommended Citation

Pamela Pierson, *The VLP and a Tractor*, 84 Ala. Law. 42 (2023).

Available at: https://scholarship.law.ua.edu/fac_articles/773

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Faculty Scholarship at Alabama Law Scholarly Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Articles by an authorized administrator of Alabama Law Scholarly Commons. For more information, please contact cduncan@law.ua.edu.



The VLP and a Tractor

By Pamela Bucy Pierson

Mrs. Annie Taylor learned she was being sued for conversion

when a man appeared at her apartment door and handed her a notice requiring her attendance in Tuscaloosa County Small Claims Court. The man told her she was being sued and that the lawsuit was scheduled for trial.

Six months after the trial, Mrs. Taylor welcomed me into her home, a tidy apartment in Tuscaloosa where she and her husband of 59 years lived before he died in January 2021.

Mrs. Taylor is 82 years old. She is tall, friendly, and spry and has one of the biggest smiles I've ever seen. Pictures of her family adorn every surface in her small living room. She proudly shows me her husband and each of her kids and grandkids.

We sat at her kitchen table where a big pot of greens soaked as she told me about the case. "When that man left after giving me the notice to be in court," she said, "I was so scared." She had never been to court, never seen a courtroom, thought court was the same as jail, and that she was being ordered to report to jail. After the man left,

she called her daughter and talked with other family members, one of whom knew about the Volunteer Lawyers Program (VLP) and contacted the VLP on Mrs. Taylor's behalf. Jon Townsend, a volunteer attorney with the VLP and partner at Dorroh & Mills PC in Tuscaloosa, took Mrs. Taylor's case.

On the day of the trial, March 7, 2022, one of Mrs. Taylor's daughters, as well as one of her granddaughters, an RN who lives in Atlanta, came to court with a terrified Mrs. Taylor. Jon Townsend met them at the courthouse.

The lawsuit filed against Mrs. Taylor was brought by a man she had known "all that boy's life." As Mrs. Taylor explained, he was the same age as one of her daughters, and when he was growing up, "was at our house all the time, and oh my, how that boy could eat!" The complaint sought \$3,600 in damages, plus court costs. At issue was an old, rusty, inoperable tractor that sat for years on a vacant lot in Coaling, Alabama, next to where Mrs. Taylor and her husband lived before moving to Tuscaloosa.

The plaintiff took the stand and claimed that in January 2020, he and Mr. Taylor entered into an agreement for the sale of the tractor, that he (the plaintiff) had paid for the tractor in installments, making the last payment in December 2020. He claimed that when he went to get the tractor, in early 2021 after Mr. Taylor had died, it was gone.

Mrs. Taylor also testified. She testified that she knew nothing about the tractor or any agreement regarding it. "My husband didn't tell me nothing about that tractor," she said. "He took care of everything outside and I took care of everything inside." She did not talk with her husband or with anyone else, including the plaintiff, about the tractor. She never got or saw any money for the tractor. She had no knowledge of what happened to the tractor or its present location.

The judge asked questions of both parties and concluded that the plaintiff failed to produce "any evidence

to establish that Defendant took possession of the property, denied Plaintiff the property, or allowed it to be disposed of to another." The court dismissed the plaintiff's case for failure to meet his burden of proof.

What did Mrs. Taylor think after her experience in court? One thing is clear. She thinks the world of Jon Townsend: "Oh, he was so good! He was just like the lawyers on television, asking questions and explaining the case. He is so sweet. I just love him to death."

Jon Townsend joined the VLP shortly after he began practicing law in Alabama. Why does he do it? "It's the right thing to do," Jon says. Created in 1990 by the Alabama State Bar, the Volunteer Lawyers Program matches attorneys who wish to do pro bono work with low-income clients in their communities who need civil legal assistance. Every year, more than 2,000 attorneys volunteer through the Alabama State Bar's VLP to give their time, service, and expertise to thousands of Alabamians who would not otherwise have access to justice. It doesn't take much time. The average VLP case takes only five hours. And, as Jon says, "There's nothing better about being a lawyer than experiencing the gratitude of someone like Mrs. Taylor."

If you would like the experience of helping someone in need and reminding yourself why you became a lawyer, go to <https://www.alabar.org/programs/volunteer-lawyers-program/enrollment/form/> to volunteer to become a VLP lawyer. ▲



Townsend

Pamela Bucy Pierson



Pamela Pierson is the Bainbridge Mims Emeritus Professor of Law at the University of Alabama School of Law. A former federal prosecutor, she also taught at the law school for 33 years. She serves of counsel to Frohsin, Barger & Walthall LLC, writes books, and works with community reentry programs. Pam is a longtime and ardent supporter of the Alabama State Bar Volunteer Lawyers Program.