

Outgoing Chair's Column

The Three Who Impressed Me the Most

By Robin Bogan

This past year, I had the opportunity to watch the best and brightest family law attorneys in New Jersey. Those that were most impressive to me were the attorneys who took an active role in effectuating changes in the law and our profession. What also struck me about the three people who inspired me most was a common thread — humility, vision, commitment to excellence, and their leadership that motivated others to get the job done. The three attorneys who moved me during my year as Chair of the Family Law Section were the following:

Deb Guston

On June 29, 2022, Deb Guston received the Saul Tischler Award, the highest award given to New Jersey family law attorneys. Deb is a partner at Guston & Guston in Glen Rock. Lizanne Cecconi, who introduced Deb at the Tischler Award dinner, artfully noted that while most past Tischler recipients were honored for their work in dissolving marriages, Deb was “honored for her work in creating marriages (through marriage equality), and creating families (through adoption, reproduction rights and even her work in animal rights).” InsiderNJ in 2021 said the following: “Deb Guston is one of the brightest lights on NJ’s legal candelabra....On family law and criminal justice reform, you’re hard pressed to find a more influential attorney in the State of NJ than Deb Guston.”

I had the opportunity to witness Deb in action on several Zoom calls concerning pending legislation potentially effecting our family law practice. From my vantage point, you always want Deb’s input and sound advice. She is analytical, thoughtful and a problem solver. She thinks before she speaks and when she does, everyone stops to listen. What impressed me most was Deb’s passion and enthusiasm. It made me wish that there was a way to bottle it.

Brian Paul

Brian Paul is the co-managing partner at Szaferman

Lakind in Lawrenceville. Brian is the Co-Vice Chair of the New Jersey State Bar Association’s Amicus Committee which reviews requests that the NJSBA become involved as an *amicus* party in matters pending before New Jersey and federal Courts. He is also the Co-Chair of the Family Law Executive Committee’s Amicus Committee. Brian has either argued on behalf of a party or as *amicus curiae* on behalf of the NJSBA or been involved in writing the brief on cases such as *S.W. v. G.M.*, *Bisbing v. Bisbing*, *Major v. Maguire*, *In the Matter of the Adoption of a Child by J.E.V. & D.G.V.*, and *Lombardi v. Lombardi*, and the list goes on.¹

I worked with Brian on the *amicus* brief the NJSBA filed with the state Supreme Court in *Kathleen M. Moynihan v. Edward J. Lynch*² and in preparing for oral argument. The brief focused on the enforceability of written palimony agreements where a notarized agreement was unenforceable because the parties had not sought legal advice as required under the 2010 Amendment to the Statue of Frauds, *N.J.S.A. 25:1-5(h)*. In their decision issued on March 8, 2022, the Supreme Court found that the statute’s provision compelling parties to seek the advice of counsel before signing a palimony agreement violated the substantive due process guarantee of the New Jersey State Constitution.

Brian was instrumental in assuring that the NJSBA’s appearance before the Supreme Court of New Jersey was impactful. He ensured that our legal arguments were clearly presented and supported. In anticipation of oral argument, I enjoyed discussing various approaches with Brian and reviewing the possible questions that I might be asked. He is a family law attorney with the highest intellect. What I most appreciated about Brian was that he never made me feel like any question I asked was silly or unimportant. He was also incredibly responsive and even spoke with me over the phone as I was driving to Trenton for the oral argument. Working with Brian was an absolute pleasure and now that my term is over, I now need to see how I can enlist his help with my golf game.

Amy Wechsler

Amy Wechsler has been practicing law since 1985 and is with Lawrence Law in Watchung. Amy led the Parenting Coordination Task Force which issued recommendations in connection with appointing parenting coordinators in Family Law matters. This task force, which included family lawyers and psychologists, met over two years, researched parenting coordination programs in other states, examined the comments and criticisms of the parenting coordination pilot process contained in the 2009-2011 Supreme Court Family Practice Report and engaged in discussion and debate on the issue.

Amy's initiative was vetted and endorsed by the NJSBA Board of Trustees. On July 29, 2021, President Dominick Carmagnola forwarded to Chief Justice Stuart Rabner a report and proposed court rule on Parenting Coordination from the Family Law Section for his consideration. This thorough report is being considered by the Supreme Court Family Practice Committee.

Once this report was on its way, Amy did not stop there. She reached out to me to discuss assembling another task force to study the Guardian Ad Litem role and whether there should be any rule changes. Amy assembled a team of attorneys and mental health professionals to study this area of our practice. Amy will also be assisting with President Jeralyn Lawrence's "Putting Lawyers First Task Force," subcommittee that will be examining how we can improve lawyers' ability to attend to mental health issues and physical health issues.

Successful leaders surround themselves with people who have the strengths that they do not possess. Amy, as a talented family law attorney in her own right, knows how to assemble the right combination of people, with

varied skill sets to permit healthy debate and effectuate positive changes in family law. Similar to a Broadway play director who galvanizes actors resulting in a grand performance, Amy is a master collaborator who knows how to hone the strengths of her team to present an incredible work product. Amy is committed to taking affirmative steps that are designed to improve family law. We are lucky to have Amy at the helm of any initiative.

Passing the Baton

Now that I have passed the baton to our new Chair, Derek Freed, you should all have great hope for the future of the Family Law Section. You are in great hands not only due to Derek's leadership style, character, and intellect, but due to the collective efforts of our whole membership. Deb, Brian and Amy are only three examples of what a combination of initiative, hard work, and brain power is able to achieve.

Our mission is to serve as the statewide leader in the field of family law and to be involved and instrumental in any decision that impacts family law issues in New Jersey. What is unique about the newly installed officers, which include Derek Freed, Megan Murray, Jeff Fiorello, Cheryl Connors and Christine Fitzgerald, is that they understand that this organization's mission is larger than any one member. They also know that they achieve more working together moving in the same direction, than they could ever accomplish alone on separate paths. Thank you to everyone who contributed to our Section having such an incredible year. I look forward to the next chapter of this vibrant and inspiring organization and witnessing all it is destined to achieve. ■

Endnotes

1. *S.W. v. G.M.*, 462 N.J. Super. 522 (App. Div. 2020).
Bisbing v. Bisbing, 230 N.J. 309 (2017).
Major v. Maguire, 224 N.J. 1 (2016).
In the Matter of the Adoption of a Child by J.E.V. & D.G.V., 226 N.J. 90 (2016).
Lombardi v. Lombardi, 447 N.J. Super 26 (App. Div., 2016); *certif. denied*, 228 N.J. 445 (2016).
2. 250 N.J. 60 (2022).