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Move outside of your comfort zone

By Janice Boback

May it please the court . . . not sure if the court was really pleased but I know I was. I recently had the opportunity to argue a case before the United States Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit in Washington, D.C. It was a wonderful experience, one that I will remember as one of the highlights of my career. I was the Appellant and represented the widow of a gentleman I will call Mr. D. Mr. D was a retired member of the United States Military and recipient of a Railroad Retirement Annuity. The Appellee was Mr. D's ex-wife. My client was married to Mr. D for more than 11 years and the Appellee was married to Mr. D for 40 years. The issue was who was the proper beneficiary of his railroad retirement annuity. The facts of the case are not particularly important for this article. The point of the article is that I almost gave up the opportunity to argue this case before the United States Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit in Washington, D.C. based on my uneasiness of moving outside of my comfort zone.

I practice in at least 13 different counties in Illinois. I enjoy traveling to other court-houses, getting to know the attorneys and

learning how things are done outside of Cook County, and believe me when I say, "things are done differently outside of Cook County." I have argued in several different Appellate Courts in Illinois and have done some work in Bankruptcy Court. These are my comfort zones—they are all right here in our great state of Illinois.

When the potential client initially came into see me, I was sure I was not going to be able to take the case because I was not admitted to practice before the United States Court of Appeal for the Federal Circuit in Washington D.C. where the Appeal needed to be filed. I was sure that I had no business taking this case. Factually, it was certainly a case that I was interested in and was in my area of practice and expertise; however, taking on a case that would require me to move outside of my comfort zone (aka this great state of Illinois) was not an easy decision. Initially, I thought it was a very easy decision, "sorry, I cannot accept your case as I am not a member of the Bar where your case needs to be filed." I am so glad that I did not make the decision easy. I investigated what it would take to be admitted to this particular Court

and realized that since I was already admitted to practice in the Federal Court for the Northern District of Illinois and the United States Supreme Court, all I had to do was fill out the application, provide certifications regarding my other admissions, affidavits of good standing, pay a fee and just like that – I'm in. I printed out the Rules of the Court – read them from start to finish and accepted the case.

There was a lot to learn and some mistakes along the way (mistakes that were correctable and not the kiss of death) but it was truly an experience of a life time. I would encourage all of my colleagues to move outside of their comfort zone if the opportunity presents itself. Even if it is taking a case in another county—you learn so much from the people you meet. I will leave you with a quote from Dr. Seuss, "the more that you read the more things you will know. The more that you learn the more places you'll go." ■

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