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**The Long Road:
 From Frightened and Abused To Confident and At Peace**

T. found help at RLS after trying to extricate herself from a toxic relationship. She realized that tackling this huge problem alone was simply not possible, so after some scary moments and much worrying about how she would be able to find representation, T. learned about RLS and reached out for assistance.

At the age of 19, T. met, and subsequently married, a man who presented himself as a decent person, but the reality turned out much differently than the initial impressions would suggest. T.'s husband was controlling and abusive both physically and psychologically; he possessed messianic tendencies and an extreme mistrust of institutional authority preferring a separatist existence off the grid.

During her pregnancy, T. was forced to live outdoors, and her husband would not allow her access to any prenatal care. The baby was delivered without any assistance. Moreover, once the baby was born, T.'s husband prevented their child from receiving healthcare of any kind, no well-baby visits and no vaccinations. He refused to allow T. to obtain a birth certificate, and T. knew that there would be no school in her child's future. As it was, T's husband did not allow much social interaction, and as a result, they lived a very isolated existence.

Resolute in her decision to break away from a life of fear, abuse and uncertainty, T. fled with her child. She found employment, began taking classes toward a certification for clinical nursing assistant work and felt a sense of normalcy beginning to take hold. That security was shattered the day her husband appeared without warning at her place of work. Shortly thereafter, he filed a petition with the court seeking full custody of the child despite the fact that he had never provided for the child, either financially or substantively. Of course, this only increased T.'s anxiety because she lacked the resources to hire a private attorney. Based on a court clerk's referral and some additional research, T. found her way to RLS.



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RLS assigned Julianna Bae to her case; with Ms. Bae’s skillful advocacy, T. learned, in what was at times a painful process, how the civil legal system adjudicates family law cases. The Court must determine what is in the best interests of the child. At first, T.’s husband was given supervised visitations, but after a period of time he attempted to kidnap the child, and was only prevented from doing so by quick action from the child care provider who alerted both T. and the police, blocking the way until help arrived.

T. now has sole custody of her child, a protective order in place against her husband and child support. While the process was very stressful at times, T. expressed her gratitude for RLS’ help this way, “I’m happy now, I’m confident and at peace. I did not know where to turn for help, and it was a blessing that there was someone like Ms. Bae to help me. What you all do is amazing!” T. is optimistic about her future; she reports that her daughter is smart and happy and as quick as a whip. RLS is now helping T. to obtain a birth certificate for her child so that when the time comes, she can enroll her very bright child in school to provide her with the academic opportunities she deserves.

INTERESTED IN VOLUNTEERING AT RLS? Visit our website at www.raplegal.com to find out how.

Intern Spotlight

Spanning the time between her former career as an attorney in her native Venezuela and her yet to be determined future career, Carolina Martinez maintains a busy schedule volunteering at RLS, working to improve her English fluency and caring for her busy family.

Carolina specialized in finance law and was working for the Santander Banking Group in Caracas when she met and subsequently married her husband, a State Department officer, at which point she embarked on a period of international postings, most notably in The Philippines and Peru. On arriving in the U.S., Carolina and her family settled here in Virginia, which proved a stroke of luck for RLS.



Carolina puts her considerable skills to work in the translation of our website as well as other materials available to the public so that greater numbers of people can gain access to important information without having to surmount a language barrier. Carolina brings a wealth of knowledge and experience to her work, and as a native speaker of Spanish, she is able to produce a more rounded and nuanced translation. Bringing not only her bilingual abilities but her bicultural experiences to bear in her work, she captures the integrity of the contextual meaning without having to rely solely on a literal translation of the given material. Her legal training provides value-added proficiency in conveying subject matter accurately. Not only do we benefit from Carolina’s expertise, but she brings her upbeat attitude with her at all times which adds sparkle to our office. ¡Muchas gracias por su trabajo!

Board Member and Advocate-Cathaleen Skinner

Cathaleen Skinner has been an activist throughout her adult life, so it is no coincidence that the Harvard Law School graduate spends some of her very limited spare time working on behalf of RLS as one of our newest board members—that is when she is not taking care of the responsibilities at her day job as an attorney with the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau. Early in her career, Cat worked at Harvard’s legal aid clinic and later at Greater Boston Legal Services. When asked what animates her respect for the work performed by legal services, Cat recounted an event that she witnessed at the tender age of five years, one that produced a profound and chilling memory.



Upon arriving home one afternoon from a family outing, a scene of domestic violence played out before Cat’s eyes. Her neighbor, a brawny military policeman, was dragging his petite wife by her hair toward their house. Cat’s father, a junior enlisted man, tried to intervene, but it was of no use as her father did not out rank his abusive neighbor. And so it was that nobody was able to stop the violence from continuing despite pleas entreating him to relent.

Now, far removed from that day, Cat unpacks the incident into its constituent parts as a way to explain her affinity for legal services—the trauma of the violence, the skewed nature of the balance of power and the silence of those who don’t want to get involved. Reflecting on these issues, Cat talked about the need for entities like legal services that work to ensure the rights of those who are not powerful enough to secure them on their own. Her instincts were not only informed by the events of that day, but by the continued example of her parents who did not remain on the sidelines. Thanks, Cat, for your service on the RLS Board of Directors!

VISIT OUR OFFICE

The Fredericksburg, Culpeper and Tappahannock RLS offices invite you to tour the facilities. Meet the staff, attorneys and volunteers who work together to ensure equal access to justice in the community. We are more than happy to answer any questions you may have when you come in.

Call or email our office today!

**RLS
40TH ANNIVERSARY
GALA**

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A Logistical Feat...

As the sole attorney in the Tappahannock Office for almost the entire 29 years of his work with RLS, John Rellick has been riding the circuit throughout the seven counties of the Tappahannock service area to appear in court on behalf of his clients. Beneath the simple geography of traversing such a large area with limited resources of time and money, lies the more complicated matter of metaphysics. It is, so far as we know, impossible to be in several places at one time, but that is what would be required for John to represent his clients when court conflicts occur. Conflicts arise in part because the service area overlays two separate judicial districts, but also because civil cases are heard simultaneously in all three of the courts in Virginia's system: Juvenile & Domestic Relations Court, General District Court and Circuit Court. Even with *pro bono* support from area attorneys, conflicts such as these occur a few times a month, and when they do, John's clients are faced with the reality of going into court on their own. John advises his clients based on the facts and the law, but there is no substitute for a trained attorney. Studies show that *pro se* litigants are much less likely to prevail for obvious reasons; a fact that John is acutely aware of, but given the alternative of no legal aid attorney versus the current situation, he is grateful to be able to provide legal expertise where and when he can. Statistics show that there is one private attorney for every 350 Virginians, but there is only one legal aid attorney for every 5500 *poor* Virginians. That fact plays out to startling effect in our Tappahannock Office.

29 Years and Counting...



John is what one might call a lifer. He joined RLS in 1984 fresh off a five year stint at a legal aid office in Erie, PA, in what he describes as an effort to escape the long and brutal winters there. Whether in Erie or Tappahannock, public interest law has proven a gratifying investment of time over the years. John was fueled by the desire to work for the public good as early as his undergraduate days. By the time he graduated from Northwestern University Law School in 1978, John felt entirely ready, and more than willing, to conquer society's major problems. Though a bit more circumspect these days, John remains clear-eyed about the impact of his advocacy on individuals and the larger community. Through a robust combination of client services, community involvement and legislative advocacy, John is achieving what he set out to do originally, though maybe just in a slightly different way than he had originally planned.

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