



JAN HILL

Copywriter for Law and Legal Technology

Powerful Storytelling Wins the Case

The Challenge

Almost from the time Stacey first slid onto a piano bench, she had dreamt of becoming a concert pianist. Despite a tight family budget, her parents always managed to scrape together the money to pay for her piano lessons. As a young teenager, Stacey was able to master extremely difficult pieces, and one of the most renowned piano teachers in her area accepted her as a student. Even an unplanned pregnancy while in high school and single motherhood did not dissuade Stacey from her goal, and she decided to go to college and make her dreams a reality.

When Stacey looked for colleges, she considered two things: tuition and the strength of their piano performance program. She finally chose Black Hills State University, a 90-minute drive from her parent's home, where she and her young son lived. BHSU offered affordable in-state tuition, solid professors, and a challenging music program. Stacey's future looked bright – until one day during her senior year.

That afternoon, Stacey was driving home after another long day at school, and was relieved to have almost reached her destination. She pulled into the turning lane on Highway 44 and waited for traffic to clear so she could turn left and head for home. Glancing briefly in to the rearview mirror, Stacey was horrified to see a car heading straight for her at highway speed – there was no way he would not hit her from behind. Gripping the steering wheel with both hands, she closed her eyes, straightened her arms and braced for the impact.

Stacey woke up in the hospital several hours later, surrounded by family who were grateful that she was still alive. Amazingly, she had no broken bones and appeared extremely lucky to have escaped with only “soft-tissue” injuries, maladies that did not show up on x-rays or other medical tests but were nevertheless painful and required months of treatment.

At first, Stacey assumed the pain and tingling in her wrists and the lack of strength in her hands would improve with treatment. But after nearly a year of medical appointments, physical therapy, and chiropractic treatments, she seemed no better, and could not do the thing that she loved the most – play the piano at a professional level.

To make matters worse, the elderly man who had hit Stacey from behind passed away about a year after the accident, and his insurance company was still refusing to pay for her medical treatment. Now that her pianist career appeared to be over, Stacey had not finished college, instead accepting a low-paying job at a local blood bank.

Stacey's dream had been taken from her. But what was her dream worth?

The Solution

Although she was tempted to accept the insurance company's latest offer, Stacey decided to seek the advice of a personal injury attorney. The attorney immediately liked Stacey, was sympathetic to her plight, and strongly felt that a jury would feel the same way. After negotiating with the liability insurance company but unable to reach a settlement, he helped Stacey file a lawsuit against the estate of the driver who was liable.

Jan Hill was the paralegal assigned to the case. She also took a liking to Stacey, and worked hard to help her attorney prepare her case. She arranged for the testimony of Stacey's former piano professor, along with many other witnesses who would help build Stacey's case. She even worked with the court administrator to allow a keyboard to be brought in to the courtroom so that the professor could demonstrate Stacey's playing ability before and after the accident.

Stacey was a compelling witness during her trial, but there were definite weaknesses in the case. Soft-tissue injuries are hard to explain to a jury – no broken bones, fractures, or visible tears. Although Stacey was a likeable plaintiff, the jury also felt sympathy for the widow of the man who caused the accident, who sat at the counsel table every day, had nothing to do with Stacey's injuries, but stood to lose a lot of money. There was also the question of the worth of Stacey's career – she was a student at Black Hills State University, not Julliard, and it was impossible to predict what she might have earned as a concert pianist in the Midwest.

The attorney knew he needed a dramatic closing argument to improve Stacey's chances. So he picked up Stacey's worn piano bench and stood before the jury with a story to tell.

The attorney used anthropomorphism – the attribution of human characteristics to non-living things – to tell Stacey's story from the perspective of her piano bench. He talked about how as a young child she climbed up, her feet still unable to reach the floor. How she sat there and practiced for hours every day, playing for her family without being told. How her playing made her father happy, even if he'd had a hard day. He looked forward to hearing Stacey play, and sometimes sat on the bench with her. The attorney talked about how Stacey didn't sit on the bench anymore, hadn't for a long time, and how lonely and useless he, the bench, now felt.

The Result

The courtroom was mesmerized and close to tears. Words made a piano bench come to life, and helped the jury understand that because of this accident, Stacey's dreams were gone. They awarded Stacey \$100,000 to help her to find a new dream.

As the attorney knew, words are powerful. Powerful enough so to make an inanimate object come to life, strong enough to illustrate injuries when x-rays and CT scans are unable to do so, and compelling enough to obtain a fair award to compensate Stacey for her injuries.

Jan Hill is the right copywriter for you because she can give legal solutions life through her storytelling. Looking for compelling case studies that will breathe life into your firm's successes? Want to generate leads for your organization with news-inspired blog posts? Need help to obtain more clients? Jan can tell your stories and help make the dreams you have for your company a reality.

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919 Saint James Street

Rapid City, SD 57701

Phone: 605-390-3332

www.janhillcopywriter.com