

Purely for the plaintiffs

Victoria Pugh changed his life.

The 23-year-old was beautiful, 5'6", with a determined voice and an ambitious nature. Derric Crowther '96, a trial attorney who was defending an asbestos manufacturer for Evert & Weathersby in Atlanta, had interviewed upwards of 200 witnesses in cases related to the health effects of asbestos. Most of them had been men in their 70s with visages of death.

Derric Crowther '96



Photo by Bonnie Heath/Daily Report

As Crowther watched Pugh walk into the deposition room, he said to himself, "This is the most frivolous lawsuit I've seen in my life."

But within 10 minutes of questioning, Pugh's breath began to fail and her head slump until, exhausted, she lay on the table, trying still to answer questions about how such a young woman could have contracted mesothelioma, a rare, incurable form of lung cancer associated with asbestos exposure occurring decades earlier.

"She looked up at me and said, 'I wanted to be a lawyer, just like you,'" he said during a phone interview from his Atlanta office. "I can see her right now as I close my eyes.

"It touched me and affected me to the core. I was really moved by her. I just wanted to help her while she lay there."

Two months later, Pugh died. On her deathbed, she relayed a thank you to Crowther for showing compassion and cutting short that day's deposition.

"My heart just wasn't in it to do it anymore, to defend these big companies," he said. "I know I should be helping folks get justice instead of finding ways to deny them justice."

In 2002, Crowther began representing only plaintiffs, first through Evert & Weathersby, and then with Henry, Spiegel, Fried & Milling. He left the firm in 2003 to attend Gerry Spence's Trial Lawyers College in Dubois, Wyo., on which he has been a staff member ever since.

"Doing plaintiffs' work can be very draining at times, emotionally, physically and even spiritually, depending on whom you're sitting across from," he said. "It (Trial Lawyers College) is an opportunity if nothing more than to recharge your batteries around other people who are trying to get justice for people."

Crowther started his own practice in 2003 and took on a partner, Solomon H. Ashby Jr., this June. Their caseload includes medical malpractice, product liability and toxic tort cases, with Crowther consulting on medical malpractice and toxic tort cases nationally.

Crowther, who at UD was on the mock trial team and was president of BLSA, sees his job as giving a voice to those who are underrepresented. He donated funds to support diverse students at the UD School of Law. Such diversity is important for all students, he said, since lawyers are required to understand the cases of people of all backgrounds. "We require, at the very least, exposure to folks of different backgrounds so we don't come off not knowing, as we often do," he said.

To better know his clients, Crowther invites them over for dinner with his wife, Dr. Freda McCarter, and visits with them and their families at their homes.

"If I'm going to go to court and represent them, I need to be their voice, and so I need to know them."

—Michelle Tedford