

PRO BONO LEGAL SERVICES: No “Shuckin’ and Jivin’”

By Pamela H. Bucy

On July 9, 2006, Bill Redmond,² age 77, passed away. When he became sick with lung disease years before, he became confined to a wheelchair and bed. At that time he told Debby,³ his wife, that he did not want to go to a nursing home. She said, that’s fine, I will take care of you. And she did.

Over 6 feet tall, Mr. Redmond was not easy to move. Yet sometimes alone, sometimes with the help of their children, Mrs. Redmond moved her husband multiple times a day, year after year, from a bed to a wheelchair, to a car, back to the wheelchair, to a couch, and back to the bed. During the years she cared for her husband, Mrs. Redmond, then in her mid-sixties, had a series of strokes. But she kept taking care of her husband. As she says, “it was the sick taking care of the sick.”

Mr. and Mrs. Redmond had been married for over twenty years when Mr. Redmond passed away, in 2006. During that time they lived with Mrs. Redmond’s ten children, in a small house on “their property,” outside of Daphne, Alabama. The property had been given to Mr. Redmond and his three siblings by their father who had farmed it during his lifetime. In his will, Bill Redmond left everything he owned to his wife, including his share to his family’s “their property.”

Mr. Redmond’s siblings treated Mrs. Redmond, whom they called “Sis,” graciously throughout the twenty-year Redmonds’ marriage. Mrs. Redmond was stunned to come home from her husband’s funeral to find a “For Sale” sign in front of their home. Her in-laws had decided that she owned no interest in the

property, that they owned it all, and that they could sell the property as they wished. At no time had Mrs. Redmond’s in-laws lived on the property, maintained it, or paid taxes on it. Bill and Debby Redmond had lived in the home continuously for over twenty years, made improvements on the home, maintained the property, enlarged the house, and had paid all taxes on the property.

Hurt and surprised by her in-laws’ action, Mrs. Redmond asked them what was going on. Her brother-in-law advised: “Let’s keep other people out of this. Let’s keep it between us. I’ll take care of you.” Meanwhile, these in-laws told the real estate agent with whom they had listed the property that Mrs. Redmond was not entitled to any portion of the property and that it was fine to sell the property because “Sis can go live with one of the kids.”

At this point a local property appraiser who saw what was happening asked Sam Crosby if he would help Mrs. Redmond. It would be a pro bono case. Mrs. Redmond, disabled by strokes and unable to work, had no funds. By any measure, her home, her only asset, is exceedingly modest although as Sam Crosby says, “You could offer her the Taj Mahal and she would choose her house.”

Sam Crosby took on Mrs. Redmond’s case. After three years, a title search, a petition for division, a counterclaim for partition and reimbursement, multiple conferences in probate court, a scheduled trial, and tense settlement conferences on the eve of trial, Mrs. Redmond won. Thanks to Sam Crosby, she now has the

title to her home, one-half of the road frontage of the property, and over two of the nine acres in the original plot.

What does Mrs. Redmond have to say about Sam Crosby? “They were hammering me down. If it hadn’t been for Mr. Crosby, I wouldn’t have made it.”

Why does Sam Crosby, a former State Bar President, do pro bono legal work? Here is his answer: “We can wiggle around, shuck and jive, and avoid lots of stuff, but it’s clear that the obligation of a lawyer is to serve the poor.”⁴ Sam has advice for new lawyers struggling to build their careers and practices: “Whenever you do pro bono work it comes back to help you. If you have down time – and we all do – spend it doing some pro bono work.” ▲▼▲

Endnotes

1. Quoting Samuel N. Crosby, Stone, Granade & Crosby PC; past president, Alabama State Bar, 2007-08
2. A pseudonym
3. A pseudonym
4. Sam cites to the Preamble of the *Alabama Rules of Professional Conduct*.



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