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ASK AN EXPERT

→ JEFFREY KROLL, ATTORNEY

What do personal injury lawsuits accomplish?

Jeffrey Kroll initially planned to become a corporate attorney. But when he took his first tort class at DePaul University College of Law, he loved it.

"I just thought it was very interesting — it was fascinating," he said. "This is a blast. I enjoy what I do. I enjoy the people I work for. Every day is different and I love it."

Kroll clearly has a passion for his work, but it's not always easy. His clients typically are going through the worst time of their lives, dealing with injuries that have led to paralysis, blindness, amputation or even death. Kroll has to maintain a professional demeanor no matter how heartbreaking a client's story is.

"They're coming to you for answers," he said. "They want stability. They want somebody who is going to be a leader."

At the same time, he said he can't be unfeeling.

"I don't think you could do my job well if you don't care, if you're not compassionate, if you don't empathize with them," he said. "It is a very fine line."

In the 20 years that Kroll has been in the business, he's handled cases he will

never forget. One involved a Northern Illinois University student named Brian White who died the day before his 21st birthday after a fellow fraternity member threw a cinder block that fell on White.

"It was such a devastating loss not only to his family, to this fraternity, but to the community," Kroll said. "He was a great kid. He never did a thing wrong and this happened."

Kroll was able to convince a jury that White's fraternity was responsible for the incident.

"It is still one of those (cases) that I think about all the time," he added.

Specific locations or even everyday objects can trigger powerful memories of cases he's handled.

"There's all these landmarks that will always be there for me," he said. "I think it makes me a better rounded person meeting all these people. I just hope I can touch their lives in a favorable way. Like all humans, we want to be proud of what we do. We want to make a contribution to society. I believe as personal injury attorneys we do that."

Kroll said our society is safer because of personal injury lawsuits, prompting advancements such as the beepers that sound when trucks are backing up and the discontinuation of the use of asbestos.

"I am not naive enough to think that

corporations suddenly developed consciences with these," he said. "These cases and thousands more come through cases tried in front of juries by plaintiffs' attorneys."

That said, Kroll admits that some of his colleagues have not earned his admiration.

"There are some 'ambulance chasers' out there," he said. "There are lawyers that show up at hospitals. There are lawyers that are passing out cards at the scene of an accident. Those are the ones that give us a bad name."

He admits that some cases are frivolous.

"I will see cases that come in my office that I reject, and I will see two weeks later that someone filed the suit," he said. "I don't know what we do to prohibit that."

But without personal injury attorneys, lives would be more at risk, Kroll said.

"I think people need to understand that many of the lawsuits that are filed and the results that come about from these lawsuits protect us as a society," he said. "It makes products safer, it makes the way doctors practice medicine safer, it makes truck drivers safer. Sometimes the big picture isn't really identified in a single lawsuit, but the long-term effect is favorable to all of us."

— by Pamela Lannom



Attorney Jeffrey Kroll enjoys the time he spends with his clients and the time he spends in front of the jury. "I love competition, and being in a courtroom is like participating in athletics," he said. (Jim Slonoff photo)