

## Daniel M. Soloway: CIVIL RIGHTS, PERSONAL INJURY AND FAMILY



**D**an Soloway remembers the first piece of advice he received upon entering the Florida State University College of Law in 1982. “I asked my torts professor for her best advice on how to achieve success in law school. She sized me up, stared at my long hair and replied, ‘Get a haircut.’”

So began a law school experience that has led to a 23-year legal career highlighted by awards and achievements reserved for those lawyers with exceptional competence, the highest ideals of professionalism and dedication to the legal field. From The Florida Bar President’s Pro Bono Service Award in 1990, to presenting a “friend of the court” argument before the United States Supreme Court in 2004 as the attorney chosen from over 50,000 members of the Association of Trial Lawyers of America to represent them before the Supreme Court, to his “AV” Martindale Hubbell rating and his State and National board certifications in civil trial law, Soloway credits many of his achievements to the advice he received from his professors while attending law school at FSU.

“I got the haircut first, and then I kept on listening to my professors during the next three years. In a nutshell, they advised me to work harder than all the other lawyers and to have a career that included more than just practicing law.”

Soloway took full advantage of his time in law school. With help from professors Steve Goldstein and Chuck Ehrhardt, he began trying cases as the appointed FSU Public Defender and as a summer intern with the State Attorney’s Office for the Twentieth Judicial Circuit. By the time he graduated law school with honors in 1985, Soloway had voluntarily worked for all the circuit judges in Tallahassee and clerked for the Dexter Douglass law firm. Upon graduation, he received numerous employment offers from trial law firms throughout Florida, having tried more than forty cases – including eleven jury trials – during law school.

“I accepted the job offer in Pensacola, even though it was the lowest paying position of all the offers, because it presented the greatest potential,” said Soloway. “I wanted to do constitutional law cases, including

civil rights trials and appeals. My employer gave me that discretion immediately upon passing the bar. Constitutional law was my favorite subject, although it was not the course in which I got my highest grades. Nevertheless, it was in my mind, the most important area of the law.”

During the more than two decades he has devoted to trying cases, Soloway has won numerous million and multi-million dollar jury verdicts and settlements in both civil rights and personal injury cases. Noteworthy cases include a two-week trial in Montgomery, Alabama, where Soloway convinced a federal jury to award \$2.3 million to two Florida men whose civil rights were violated when an Alabama police captain planted drugs on them to attain a criminal conviction.

In another case, Soloway won the largest settlement ever paid in a civil rights case from the Federal Bureau of Prisons, stemming from an inmate death in Atlanta, Georgia. Soloway set more records in winning a \$10 million jury verdict in a simple trip-and-fall case, one of the largest such verdicts in Florida and the nation.

The case Soloway says was one of his most rewarding also set a record jury verdict, but that is not why he treasures that victory above others. “My first federal jury trial was very rewarding because it showed me that I could really ‘do it.’ I tried the case and beat the most experienced and successful civil rights defense lawyer in the Southeast. I remember thinking, ‘I really can be good at this.’ I don’t know that it was my best effort or verdict though, because I was still a rookie, only two years out of law school.”

The civil rights case, *Mandel vs. Doe*, was only his second case after graduation from law school. Representing an injured prison inmate who was refused adequate medical care concluded in a judgment on a jury verdict of almost \$1 million, the largest such verdict in Escambia County history. The appeal of the case before the Eleventh Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals created precedent for millions of citizens in four states, and has been cited more than 1,000 times by federal appellate courts across the country.

Soloway credits his record jury verdicts to hard work and his passion for jury trials.

Yet he distinguishes his trial work from other pursuits within his legal career.

“I love to write, and I really hope to carve out the time necessary to create and publish both legal and non-legal works I can be proud of and that other people will enjoy,” Soloway said. He has already written more than a dozen published articles and, as a 21-year-old undergraduate student at the University of New York, he wrote a book on civil justice reform. His current project is a bit more ambitious since it is his first attempt at writing a screenplay.

Soloway met his current project’s subject, Alabama attorney Fred Gray, during a federal civil rights case in which Gray served as Soloway’s local counsel. At the time, Soloway had never heard of Fred Gray, nor did he even recognize the name. As the civil rights attorney for Rosa Parks, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., the Montgomery Bus Boycott, the Tuskegee Syphilis Study and hundreds of other major cases that energized the civil rights movement in America, Gray’s achievements are legendary, even if his name is not well known. Following the trial, Gray asked Soloway to write the screenplay for a Hollywood movie based upon his best-selling autobiography, “Bus-ride to Justice.” The project that is Soloway’s labor of love is almost complete.

“I also love to teach and mentor young lawyers,” said Soloway. “What I love is filling in the gaps. I love being able to give young lawyers the benefit of my experience by providing the details of practicing in various areas of law. It keeps them from falling into traps as a result of being unwary of the pitfalls of complex lawsuits and trials.”

Over the last sixteen years, Soloway has given lectures and speeches throughout Florida and the nation to hundreds of lawyers on subjects including personal injury, civil rights, disability law and trial advocacy. He also regularly teaches and mentors the associates at his law firm.

Beginning in January 2008, Florida State law students will benefit from Soloway’s years of experience and knowledge when he and Gray teach a civil rights litigation course as adjunct professors at the law school.

Since he graduated, Soloway has remained involved in the law school and

teaching is just one more way that he will strengthen his connection to Florida State. “One of the things that makes me most proud of FSU is Don Weidner,” said Soloway of the man he initially knew as a property professor. “As he’s risen to the rank of dean, I don’t think I’ve ever seen anyone work so hard to make our law school so great and it makes me very proud.” It was Dean Weidner who convinced Soloway to establish the Soloway Diversity Enhancement Scholarship Fund, which provides thousands of dollars to minority first-year students who would otherwise be unable to afford to attend Florida State Law.

With so many diverse achievements, Soloway says the accomplishment he is most proud of is doing what he said he always wanted to do. “I always wanted to be a lawyer, and I always wanted to be a family man. I was lucky; I decided at an early age what I wanted to be and how I wanted to get there, and I did it.”

Soloway’s wife Natalie (a 1987 Florida State graduate with a B.S. in psychology) and daughters Rachael Ann and Rebecca Leigh always come first. “I’m for the most part a family man. I like to spend time with my children and my wife,” he said when asked what he does in his spare time. Cooking family dinners and taking the girls to school are daily activities for the 1985 College of Law graduate and sole owner of the Soloway Law Firm in Pensacola.

In its ninth year of fighting for the rights of clients, the firm’s four attorneys and ten employees litigate cases throughout the Southeast. Over the last twenty years, Soloway’s civil rights cases have received national and even international attention, including coverage by all the major television and cable news networks, as well as *The New York Times* and other prominent print media.

“I’m leaving the public exposure and heavy litigation of the big civil rights cases to the younger lawyers at my firm,” Soloway said. With all his other projects, Soloway has plenty to do besides practicing law, evidence that he is still following the advice given to him by his law school professors more than two decades ago. ■