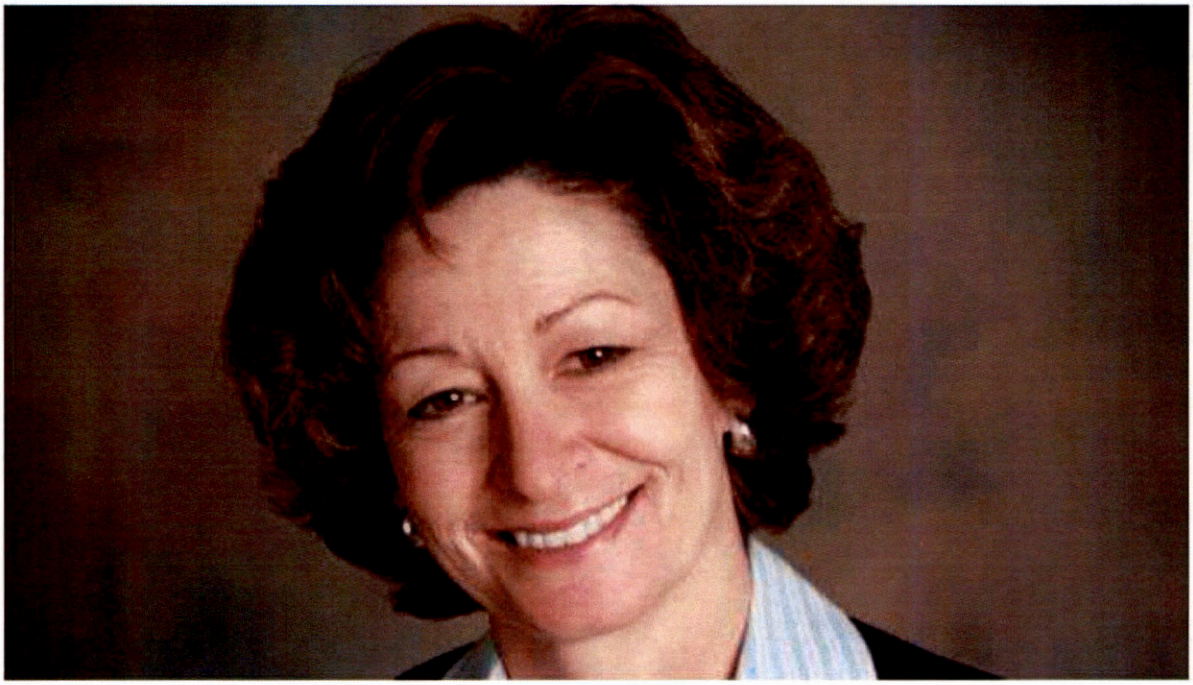
Trial Lawyer's Building It's in Their Blood: Virginia Lee Story



By Attorney at Law Magazine April 20, 2016

We sat down with Virginia Lee Story to discuss the law practice here in Franklin which has expanded to a practice with 12 attorneys since the inception in 1985. Story practices with Joanie Abernathy, Neil Campbell, Julia Stovall, Nick Harris, Steve Garner, Casey Ashworth, Diane Crosier, Katye Yarbrough, Nathan Luna & Jill Hudson.

AALM: Tell us about the founding of your office.

Story: Franklin, Tennessee is a wonderful town of growing families and businesses. When I graduated from Lipscomb University and started law school in Nashville, I began to migrate toward the Williamson County line to

work with our current clerk and master, Elaine Beeler and Mr. Dan Beeler.

I purchased a historic building in downtown Franklin. Unfortunately, an arson attack forced me to purchase my current location. In 2004, the new county courthouse – we call it the new courthouse even though it's now over 10 years old. I have been very lucky thus far in my real estate adventures and when the county announced that they were building the courthouse across the street from our law office, we were thrilled. We can now be in court in one minute.

Being a small town practice was my goal. I feel like I made the right choice for my family. My husband and I have owned Clean Earth Sanitation, Inc. and now are developing and building, Williamson County is the land of opportunity. Our children were educated in Williamson County Schools and Battle Ground Academy after grammar school which has shaped their career paths. The spiritual vibe of Williamson County has also been a source of strength for our family and my career.

AALM: What first drew you to the legal field?

Story: My father practiced law for 60 years in Kentucky. He took me to the courthouse with him when he prosecuted cases from age 12. He became the attorney for the county in condemnation proceedings acquiring the property known as the land between the lakes. While real estate law was never for me, my husband and I have been developing property for the last 10 years. I guess the real estate bug laid dormant for a time.

When I graduated from the Nashville School of Law, I was originally drawn to criminal law and did a fair amount of work in that area. As Williamson County became more of a family community, my practice began shifting toward family law. That has been my major focus for the past 25 years. I have been practicing in Williamson County for 31 years. The law has been my passion every day.

AALM: Tell us about your team.

Story: We have grown from two lawyers to 11. I have been practicing with my best friend, Joanie Abernathy, for more years than either of us care to admit. We met in law school. We have been fortunate to practice with a growing group of strong lawyers, including Neil Campbell, Julia Stovall, Nick Harris, Casey Ashworth, Diane Crosier, Steve Garner, Nathan Luna, Katye Yarbrough and Jill Hudson.

AALM: How do you and your partners balance running a business with practicing law?

Story: We are all autonomous in our practice. Each partner is their own boss. I do not dictate how they practice law, how many hours they work or their caseload. The attorneys and staff in our office are professionals and that is all I need to say about their balance. My balance is slightly weighted toward a workaholic but every year I say that I am going to find a better balance. Running a business came easy to me, I am frugal and therefore run a pretty tight ship on the overhead. The business part of the practice is time consuming but it is very worth it when you develop a system and are able to share a space with the nicest lawyers that provide a warm and productive environment in which to work.

AALM: Are there any cases that affected the way you approached the law?

Story: Yes, there were two high-profile criminal cases when I started in Franklin that shaped me as a lawyer. Both were murder trials and required a vast amount of dedication. They taught me to work hard, be prepared and something that perhaps cannot be taught, except by your parents, and that is to truly care about the clients you represent and their families but also about the victim's families.

AALM: As you look to the future, how do you see your firm evolving?

Story: I see our firm continuing to do what they do best and that is representing our clients to the best of our ability and if you do a good job then it is rewarded. We opened an office in Westhaven community in 2013 and I see that location as being a growth opportunity to serve the needs of clients.

AALM: Who are your legal heroes and how do you aspire to emulate them?

Story: My father, James E. Story taught me humility and how to practice law to the best of my ability. My mother, sisters and brothers keep me grounded. Growing up in a home with eight to 10 people at a time, only two small bathrooms and three bedrooms, certainly provided me with the tools I have come to use in my Rule 31 mediations. My best friend and partner for 30 years, Joanie Abernathy, has taught me that if you cannot say anything nice, don't say anything. There is no finer person that I know. She is genuine to the core. Justice Cornelia Clark, who was one of our circuit court judges when I began practicing, is so knowledgeable of the law and compassionate for her constituents. Her professional demeanor in everything she does is impeccable. Judge Don Harris and Judge Henry Denmark Bell both taught me to work hard and be prepared every day in court. If I was not prepared, they would sure let me know! They all inspire me as well as many others including my husband Richard Horn of 30 years who has supported my career tirelessly and our children who have sacrificed having a stay at home mom.

Attorney at Law Magazine

Attorney at Law Magazine is a national B2B trade publication for and about private practice attorneys. The magazine focuses on the industry, its events, happenings and the professionals and firms that drive its success. The editorial is a collaboration of interviews with professionals, industry expert penned columns and articles about advancing your legal practice through marketing, practice management and customer service.

Jeff Fenton

From: Tommy Anderson <tom@tommyanderson.us>
Sent: Wednesday, October 2, 2019 3:01 PM
To: Jeff Fenton; Fawn Fenton; Virginia Story
Subject: 1986 Sunny Side

Jeff,

Curious if you are in Tennessee gathering your personal property this week.
Sincerely,

Tommy Anderson

Tommy Anderson, Broker/Realtor/Auctioneer
HND Realty
www.HNDREALTY.COM
(615) 969-5819

Jeff Fenton

From: Virginia Story <virginia@tnlaw.org>
Sent: Friday, October 4, 2019 2:14 PM
To: Jeff Fenton
Cc: Heidi Macy; Kathryn Yarbrough; Tommy Anderson
Subject: RE: Fenton v. Fenton

Categories: 5-Email: Present to Court

Jeff,

Please make sure that you have vacated the property by 10/5/19 at 12 noon with only the belongings that you listed to remove.

Thanks,
Virginia

Story Abernathy & Campbell
PLLP AN ASSOCIATION OF ATTORNEYS

Virginia Lee Story
Attorney at Law
136 Fourth Avenue South
Franklin, TN 37064
(615) 790-1778
(615) 790-7468 fax
Virginia@tnlaw.org

***Note** This e-mail contains PRIVILEGED and CONFIDENTIAL information intended only for the use of the specific individual or entity named above. If you or your employer is not the intended recipient of this e-mail, or an employee or agent responsible for delivering it to the intended recipient, you are hereby notified that any unauthorized dissemination or copying of this e-mail or the information contained in it is strictly prohibited. If you have received this e-mail in error, please immediately notify the person named above at once by telephone. Thank you.*

From: Jeff Fenton
Sent: Saturday, September 28, 2019 1:52 PM
To: Virginia Story <virginia@tnlaw.org>; elaine.beeler@tncourts.gov
Cc: Heidi Macy <Heidi@tnlaw.org>; Kathryn Yarbrough <kyarbrough@tnlaw.org>
Subject: RE: Fenton v. Fenton
Importance: High

Hello Ms. Story,

YES!

Jeff Fenton

From: Tommy Anderson <tom@tommyanderson.us>
Sent: Saturday, October 5, 2019 5:15 PM
To: Virginia Story
Cc: Jeff Fenton; Heidi Macy; Kathryn Yarbrough
Subject: Re: Fenton v. Fenton

Jeff,

Checking in to see if you will be vacated 1986 Sunny Side by 5pm today Saturday October 5, 2019.
Sincerely,

Tommy Anderson

On Friday, October 4, 2019, Virginia Story <virginia@tnlaw.org> wrote:

Jeff,

Please make sure that you have vacated the property by 10/5/19 at 12 noon with only the belongings that you listed to remove.

Thanks,

Virginia

Story Abernathy & Campbell
PLLP AN ASSOCIATION OF ATTORNEYS

Virginia Lee Story

Attorney at Law

136 Fourth Avenue South

Franklin, TN 37064

(615) 790-1778

Jeff Fenton

From: Tommy Anderson <tom@tommyanderson.us>
Sent: Sunday, October 6, 2019 12:24 PM
To: Virginia Story
Cc: Jeff Fenton; Heidi Macy; Kathryn Yarbrough
Subject: Re: Fenton v. Fenton

Jeff my friend,

I will be coming by today after my son's bball game. I hope to see you gone by then, or other measures, not to your liking will be enforced. Time to move on.

Tommy Anderson

On Friday, October 4, 2019, Virginia Story <virginia@tnlaw.org> wrote:

Jeff,

Please make sure that you have vacated the property by 10/5/19 at 12 noon with only the belongings that you listed to remove.

Thanks,

Virginia

Story Abernathy & Campbell
PLLP AN ASSOCIATION OF ATTORNEYS

Jeff Fenton

From: Tommy Anderson <tom@tommyanderson.us>
Sent: Sunday, October 6, 2019 1:54 PM
To: Virginia Story
Cc: Jeff Fenton; Heidi Macy; Kathryn Yarbrough
Subject: Re: Fenton v. Fenton

Categories: 5-Email: Present to Court

Jeff will be out by tonight. I just went by & met him & his mother at Sunny Side.

Tommy

On Sunday, October 6, 2019, Tommy Anderson <tom@tommyanderson.us> wrote:

Jeff my friend,

I will be coming by today after my son's bball game. I hope to see you gone by then, or other measures, not to your liking will be enforced. Time to move on.

Tommy Anderson

THE CLOSING FOR OUR HOME WASN'T FOR THREE MORE WEEKS, ON 10/29/2019, SO WHY WERE WE BULLIED SO MUCH? ATTORNEY STORY HAD NO LEGAL AUTHORITY! THEY HAD MONTHS WITH THE HOUSE BY THEMSELVES (WHILE MY STUFF WAS STOLEN)! WHY WAS I ONLY ALLOWED 5-DAYS WITH MY ELDERLY MOTHER TO BOTH PACK AND MOVE MY 2,500 SQFT HOME? WHO MADE STORY GOD? AND THE AUCTIONEER HER ENFORCER, I PAID? A GANG OF LAWLESS THIEVES & THUGS!

Jeff Fenton

From: Tommy Anderson <tom@tommyanderson.us>
Sent: Sunday, October 6, 2019 6:35 PM
To: Virginia Story
Cc: Jeff Fenton; Heidi Macy; Kathryn Yarbrough
Subject: Re: Fenton v. Fenton

Thank you Jeff for leaving with your possesions today. We drove by & you were headed out the driveway.

Sincerely,
Tommy Anderson

Brestwood

THIS INSTRUMENT WAS PREPARED BY

Bankers Title & Escrow Corp.
5107 Maryland Way, Ste. 115
Brentwood, TN 37027
P19-10267A-BW

Mail

SAMUEL F. ANDERSON
STATE OF TENNESSEE NOTARY PUBLIC
DAVIDSON COUNTY

STATE OF TENNESSEE
COUNTY OF Williamson

THE ACTUAL CONSIDERATION OR VALUE, WHICHEVER IS GREATER, FOR THIS TRANSFER IS $ 324,360.00

Affiant

SUBSCRIBED AND SWORN TO BEFORE ME, THIS THE 29 DAY OF October 2019

Notary Public

MY COMMISSION EXPIRES: 11/3/20

(AFFIX SEAL)

WARRANTY DEED

ADDRESS NEW OWNER(S) AS FOLLOWS:	SEND TAX BILLS TO:	MAP-PARCEL NUMBERS
GL Properties, LLC	GL Properties, LLC	
1986 Sunnyside Drive	101 Creekside Crossing #1700195	013J-A-035.00-000
Brentwood, TN 37027	Brentwood, TN 37027	
(CITY) (STATE) (ZIP)	(CITY) (STATE) (ZIP)	

NOTICE OF JUDICIAL VACANCY

Circuit Court, Division III
21st Judicial District
Williamson County

Pursuant to Tenn. Code Annotated § 17-4-308(d), notice is hereby given that the Trial Court Vacancy Commission will meet in the 21st Judicial District to initiate the process of filling the vacancy in the Circuit Court, Division III, occurring on September 30, 2023, following the retirement of Judge Michael W. Binkley on September 29, 2023. The Commission will meet Thursday, August 31st in the Mayor and Aldermen Board Room in the Franklin City Hall located at 109 3rd Ave S., Franklin, TN 37064, at 9:00 a.m. CDT.

Applicants must be an attorney licensed in Tennessee who is at least 30 years of age, a resident of the state for five years, and must reside in the Judicial District. The Commission is committed to encouraging a diverse judiciary and welcomes all qualified attorneys to apply.

For an applicant to be considered for the judicial vacancy, the Administrative Office of the Courts must receive a completed application **by Wednesday, July 26, 2023 at 12:00 p.m. CST**. The application and instructions are available at http://www.tncourts.gov/administration/judicial-resources. A completed application includes: (1) the original signed (unbound) application; **and** (2) a digital copy of the application. The Commission encourages applicants to submit applications as soon as possible and communicate with the Administrative Office of the Courts to schedule hand-delivery or provide delivery tracking information for the original application to help ensure timely receipt by the deadline.

Any member of the public may attend the public hearing to express, orally or in writing, objections concerning applicant(s) for the judicial vacancy.

If you require an accommodation and/or have special needs because of a qualified disability, have questions about the Commission, or need to schedule hand-delivery or provide delivery tracking information for an application, please contact John Jefferson at the Administrative Office of the Courts at John.Jefferson@tncourts.gov or 615-741-2687.

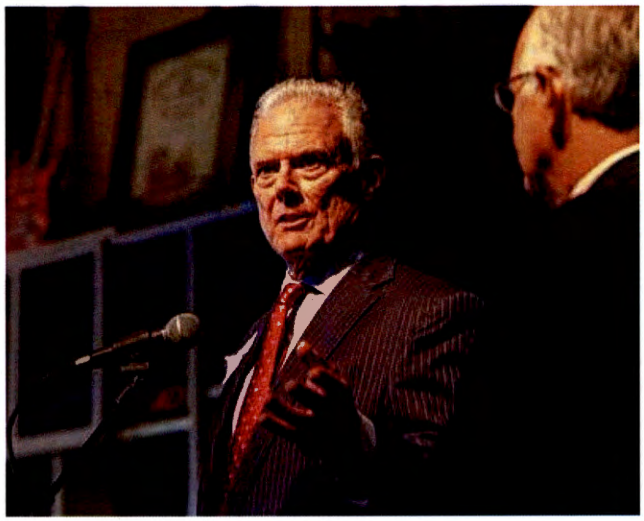
This the 6th day of July, 2023.

Williamson County Judge Michael Binkley to retire a year after reelection

Asked why he would retire a year after winning an eight-year term: 'Why not?'

BY MATT MASTERS
JUL 12, 2023

Williamson County Circuit Judge Michael W. Binkley will retire in September despite having been reelected to the bench just shy of one year ago.



Judge Michael Binkley addresses supporters at Franklin's Puckett's Grocery and Restaurant during a reelection campaign kick-off event for himself and fellow sitting Judges James Woodruff and Deanna Johnson.

Matt Masters

Binkley, 72, is set to retire on Sept. 29, after serving 11 years on the bench and a 35-year career as a trial lawyer in private practice.

When asked why he would retire after campaigning for and winning re-election to the eight-year term in 2022, Binkley responded, "Why not?," adding that he has other things that he wants to do with his life.

"I have thoroughly enjoyed being a trial judge for the last 11 years," Binkley told *Post* sister publication *The News*. "I have really enjoyed serving the judiciary as well as serving the citizens of Williamson County. I have been honored to hold this position, and I've really enjoyed it. Going forward, I look forward to opportunities in my life, inside the law and, mostly, outside of the law."

In 2021, Binkley told voters and supporters that the role of judge "gives me the opportunity

to do the right thing each and every time, and it's worked for me, and that's exactly what I intend to continue to do."

Binkley's time on the bench has not been without controversy after he was caught in a prostitution sting in 2010, two years before he became judge. Fallout from that incident has played out in the courts and through ethics complaints.

Binkley has also been the subject of the "Investigate Michael W. Binkley Circuit Court Judge" Facebook page, which was created in 2017.

According to the Tennessee Administrative Office of the Courts, applications to fill the judicial vacancy will be accepted until July 26, and on Aug. 31, the Trial Court Vacancy Commission will hold a public meeting in Franklin to discuss the vacancy and applicants.

A replacement will then be appointed by Gov. Bill Lee. The appointee will serve until the next general election, when voters will elect a replacement.

Qualified applicants must be licensed attorneys who are at least 30 years old who have been residents of the state for five years and are residents of the 21st Judicial District.

This story was first published by our sister publication The News.

Matt Masters

Supreme Court of Tennessee Blog

A legal blog dedicated to covering the Supreme Court of Tennessee (and other interesting legal issues)

Tag Archives: Sandy Garrett

The Tennessee Justice System Has a Bigoted Personnel Problem. Unfortunately, the Bureaucrats Responsible for Overseeing It Don't Care.

June 12, 2019 First Amendment, Rules of Professional Conduct Daniel Horwitz, Sandy Garrett, Tennessee Board of Professional Responsibility
By Daniel Horwitz:

It seems that almost every week now, government officials involved in Tennessee's justice system make headlines for their overt, unapologetic bigotry. In May of this year, for instance, Shelby County Criminal Court Judge Jim Lammey gained national attention after posting an article that referred to Muslim immigrants as "foreign mud" and said that Jews should "get the f**k over the Holocaust." Weeks later, Coffee County District Attorney Craig Northcutt provoked an initial wave of outrage after posting (among other disqualifying nonsense) that Muslims' "belief system is evil, violent and against God's Truth," only to outdo himself shortly thereafter when a video surfaced of him proclaiming that gay couples don't enjoy constitutional rights and would not be protected by domestic violence statutes within his jurisdiction. And today, the Knoxville News Sentinel reports that Knox County Sheriff's Detective Grayson Fritts recently declared that "federal, state and county governments should arrest, try, convict and 'speedily' execute people within the LGBTQ community" for participating in Pride parades.

These outrages are not isolated. They also are not surprising, given the shockingly indifferent way that such disqualifying conduct is treated by the bureaucrats who oversee Tennessee's justice system. And they will continue to occur over and over and over again until administrators like BPR Chief Disciplinary Counsel Sandy Garrett are replaced with competent, capable people who consider bigotry and misconduct by public officials at least as problematic as private attorneys loaning poor clients money so that they can pay their rent.

This is not an exaggeration. Tennessee's Board of Professional Responsibility—the shadowy, quasi-governmental body that regulates lawyers in Tennessee—has routinely turned a blind eye to racism and approached the absolute worst forms of misconduct with kid gloves under circumstances when the violators were participants in Tennessee's justice system. In 2014, for instance, a Shelby County District Attorney who was caught (and admitted) withholding exonerating evidence in a capital murder case received nothing more than a public censure. In other circumstances, misconduct in the form of racist comments made by District Attorneys during prosecutions were ignored by the body entirely. And indeed, during an insane attempted power grab last year that would have afforded the BPR wide-ranging authority to censor and prosecute a vast amount of constitutionally protected, private attorney speech, at Ms. Garrett's urging, the BPR itself sought to carve out a special disciplinary exemption for prosecutors who exercised racist peremptory challenges during jury selection.

By contrast, trivial violations that most reasonable people would not consider misconduct at all are met with fire and fury. For instance, in only the latest indication that Tennessee's BPR has lost both its purpose and its mind, the Board came down hard on one lawyer for what is apparently considered an egregious offense in this State: Helping a poor client pay her rent. Ultimately, the punishment he received was identical to the sanction that the BPR levied against the above-mentioned Memphis prosecutor who hid exonerating evidence in a capital murder case—a fact that says just about everything that needs to be said about the BPR, its judgment, and its priorities.

Most troublingly, though, Garrett's BPR has helped prevent serious misconduct by public officials from coming to light by aggressively prosecuting attorneys across the state for having the audacity to speak up or speak out against judges. Indeed, notwithstanding the absence of any conceivable harm to the public, there appears to be no surer way to guarantee severe professional sanction in Tennessee—including summary, indefinite suspension—than to stand up to a judge. Given this context, it is fair to wonder whether the culture of silence and censorship that Garrett's BPR fosters—whether deliberately or otherwise—serves to inhibit whistleblowing and allows misconduct by public officials to fester unchecked for years. Indeed, one wonders whether that's the point.

Year after year, bar associations and self-important bar leaders across Tennessee wonder aloud why the legal profession is consistently held in such low esteem by the general public. Curiously, the existence of bigoted judges and prosecutors, a structurally inadequate indigent defense system, and highly questionable behavior by professional regulators—both with respect to the way they treat practicing attorneys and prospective lawyers—never seem to come up as possible explanations. Certainly, the solutions sought by the BPR don't address any of the many legitimate reasons why the public would hold the entire legal system in low regard. Instead, to the exclusion of any justifiable priority, the approach of Tennessee's BPR has largely been to censor and prosecute lawyers who criticize governmental participants in a legal system that is failing daily.

Though few dare to challenge the BPR's behavior and priorities given credible fear of retaliation, it is past time that the BPR secured new leadership. As Garrett's BPR demonstrates year after year, the body quite simply lacks the judgment to oversee or regulate the practice of law in Tennessee. Having failed to do her job competently for long enough, the Tennessee Supreme Court should replace her. Alternatively, for the good of the profession, Garrett should do the honorable thing and resign.

Like ScotBlog? Join our email list or contact us here, or follow along on Twitter @Scot_Blog and facebook at https://www.facebook.com/scotblog.org