

Terry Bryant Accident & Injury Law

Scholarship Essay

I was nine years old when my parents' voices, once calm and cooperative, turned sharp enough to split our family in two. Their divorce had been peaceful: two Christmases, two bedrooms, and no villains. But when my mother accepted a job in Florida in 2014 and decided to leave our hometown, everything changed. Negotiating the terms of the Parenting Plan, including which state I would live in and how and where the non-custodial parent would have visitation, was unusually complicated.

I watched my parents transform from steady, cooperative co-parents into two people I barely recognized. For two years, the conflict swallowed our family whole. I watched my mother, the strongest woman I know, consistently break down and lash out. I was forced to learn, against my will, about the assault I had experienced as a small child at the hands of a close relative. It was the first time I understood that even strong people can be undone by the same systems meant to protect them. Witnessing this imperfect process showed me how deeply the law can affect the lives of the people caught inside it.

My Guardian ad Litem, Regi Martin, Esq., was the only constant during that time. She spoke to me like I was a person, not an item to be negotiated. She asked how I was truly feeling when everyone else seemed too consumed by winning or losing to notice the impact on me. Regi modeled that the law can be handled with grace and sophistication, attributes that I did not recognize in my parents' attorneys. She became the rock I clung to when the adults around me were spiraling. At the time, I could not have imagined the impact she would continue to have on my life.

Although I have dreamed of becoming an attorney for a long time, I was never quite sure what field of law I would pursue or how deep my passion went. But two years ago, as I was planning a trip back to Missouri, I was reflecting on that time with Regi. I recognized that she played a significant part in shaping my values: the way I listen, the way I treat others, and the way I understand what true advocacy looks like. I also realized that, without her, I might not have survived long enough to graduate from

middle school. I grabbed my phone to look her up and see what she was up to. I intended to contact her when I was in town to let her know how much she meant to me, even though I was just one of hundreds of children she had helped.

My eyes widened when her obituary flashed across my screen, displaying that she had passed away two weeks earlier. I broke down because I realized I would never get to tell her what she meant to me. When my flight touched down in Missouri two weeks later, I went straight to her gravesite to pay my respects.

Since then, I have committed to learning more about her career. I learned from reading comments on her obituary and local news articles that she became a circuit judge soon after my family's case was settled. She served her community until the end of her life, holding court virtually in her hospital room. She passed at the age of 63 after a long and rough battle with breast cancer. My path has become clear. I have to carry on her legacy and be that advocate and lifeline for somebody else. I want to save them like Regi saved me.

Since this revelation, I have taken action to pursue law and advocacy. Through my internship with Seminole County Bar Association Legal Aid Society, I have had the opportunity to assist underserved communities, victims of domestic violence, and veterans through complicated legal processes. I have learned that my voice can make a difference, and law school is where I will strengthen that voice into a lasting force for justice.

I would be honored to receive the Terry Bryant Scholarship, as it would allow me to continue my journey in law school, focusing solely on my educational goals and professional connections to ensure the best outcome for my legal career. Financial support would ease the burden of tuition and related expenses, giving me the freedom to dedicate more time to coursework, internships/externships, and meaningful mentorships rather than outside employment. With this support, I could further develop research, writing, and advocacy skills essential to serving future clients with competence and integrity. Most importantly,

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this scholarship would represent an investment not only in my education, but in my commitment to using the law as a tool to empower individuals and strengthen access to justice within my community.