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



By Attorney at Law Magazine

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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.



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