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# A father's life lessons left lasting impressions on son

By Tom Kirvan



R.J. "Bucky" Slomski  
Shareholder  
Burch & Cracchiolo, P.A.

The nation's fifth largest city, Phoenix features an ever-evolving skyline.

**M**uch of what R.J. "Bucky" Slomski knows about the law and how to conduct himself as an attorney was learned at the side of his father, Ray, with whom he practiced for three years before the uncertainties of life took a decidedly tragic turn.

"My dad was a very intense guy, and I think he knew that he wouldn't be doing me any favors by being easy on me when I joined his law firm," Slomski said of his father, a Northwestern University School of Law alum who, for more than three decades, was one of Arizona's finest medical malpractice attorneys.

"One of his lessons to me was that as a plaintiff litigator, you have to be different than any other kind of animal in the 'jungle,'" said Slomski. "And one way to do that is through your work ethic. Essentially, he said, there will always be a smarter animal out there, but if you outwork them, you will beat them."

It is a lesson that became part of his father's legacy when the 63-year-old Chicago native was killed in a December 2019 car collision with a tractor-trailer as he drove to his vacation home in Sun Valley, Idaho.

For his son, the fatal accident on a Nevada expressway the day after Christmas was a profound loss on both personal and professional levels.

"It, obviously, was totally unexpected and left an enormous void in our family and in the Phoenix community, where he was so active and involved for much of his life," said Slomski, who, in the aftermath of the tragedy, was faced with a series of difficult decisions about the future of the firm and its pending cases.

All while grieving the loss of his mentor, role model, confidant, and pillar of the Phoenix legal community.

Ultimately, the decision was made to dissolve the firm and to refer pending cases to other attorneys, which left Slomski with the prospect of going job-hunting during one of the most challenging times in his life.

Within a few months, he had landed a job with Burch & Cracchiolo, P.A., a Phoenix-based firm with more than 40 attorneys and a reputation as "one of the Southwest's premier law firms" in the areas of business and corporate law, construction law, insurance defense, personal injury, estate planning, family law, labor and employment law, among other specialty areas.

Historically, explained Slomski, Burch & Cracchiolo had concentrated its personal injury work on the defense side, but was willing to start handling additional plaintiff cases as the need arose.

"The timing was right for them, the area I was in was right for them, and my personality was right for them," Slomski said of the culture fit at the firm. "Frankly, it was a godsend at that time – for my career, my personal life, and my stability. It couldn't have worked out better, as the people here are not only now my partners, but some of them are lifelong friends."

Slomski joined the firm just as the COVID-19 pandemic was rearing its ugly head, making the transition to a new job even more unsettling and uncertain.

"It was a very challenging year, that much I can say for certain," said Slomski. "The firm also was moving to a new office at the time and the build-out was still going on when COVID hit."

By the fall of 2020, as the firm operated within a hybrid model of remote and



In a treasured photo, attorney Bucky Slomski smiles alongside his father, Ray, who guided a prominent medical malpractice firm in Phoenix before his death in 2019.



Avid travelers, Bucky Slomski and his wife, Helen Santilli, enjoy visiting special sights, including Horseshoe Bend on the east rim of the Grand Canyon and the Colosseum in Rome.

in-office work, Slomski had found his footing with Burch & Cracchiolo, which has been recognized as one of the “Best Places to Work in Arizona.”

“It’s been a very solid place to land on both feet and to be accepted and valued for what we are trying to accomplish in establishing a Plaintiff’s Personal Injury, Wrongful Death, Catastrophic Injury, and Medical Malpractice practice,” said Slomski.

Slomski originally planned to attend Purdue University to pursue a mechanical engineering degree, but then enrolled at The Ohio State University (OSU) where he had a broader range of academic choices. The Big Ten school also was the alma mater of his mother, Pam, and his older sister, Whitney, who is now an award-winning television commercial producer in Hollywood.

“As a family, we have a lot of Ohio State ties,” said Slomski, whose interest in

attending the school was solidified after attending a football game in Ohio Stadium, otherwise known as The Horseshoe.

“There’s nothing quite like it,” Slomski said of being part of more than 100,000 scarlet-clad fans cheering on the Buckeyes. “It’s very special to be in unison with just one goal in mind.”

Upon obtaining his undergrad degree in English from OSU in 2012, Slomski attended Arizona Summit Law School, where he earned his juris doctor in 2015. He has been active with the Arizona Trial Lawyers Association, where he has been named since 2019 as a “Top 40 Under 40 Civil Plaintiff Attorney” honoree. Since 2020, he also has been named a Southwest Super Lawyers “Rising Star,” a designation awarded to only 2.5 percent of young lawyers in Arizona.

His work in medical malpractice cases can be a complex, daunting, and exhausting

process, sometimes requiring him to digest scads of medical records and materials from various sources.

“It’s not unheard of to have 10,000 pages of documentation from a single hospital that you have to sift through,” he indicated. “And then that person might have had home health care or physical therapy or their own PCP (Primary Care Physician), or other specialist with records to go through. It takes skill and experience to categorize the important aspects of each case and to understand how the various pieces fit into the puzzle.”

Relatively few cases make it to trial, Slomski noted, making it especially important to “score points” during the deposition process.

“I learned a lot from my dad in that regard,” said Slomski, “as we would go over all the recorded depositions,

preparing video clips that could be used to impeach a witness’s testimony.”

In recent years, Slomski and his colleague, Todd Julian, helped an Arizona family reach a multi-million-dollar settlement in a wrongful death case where a man was hit by a drunken driver and was catapulted some 300 feet from the point of impact, suffering multiple broken bones, a de-gloved arm, and a traumatic brain injury before eventually succumbing to his injuries.

“Obviously, the law doesn’t bring people back to life, but it can help the decedent’s family recover something for the loss of a loved one so that they can better resume their lives,” Slomski said.

In another wrongful death case in 2023, Slomski and Julian helped a family of nine siblings reach a \$4.25 million settlement after their parents were killed in an auto


accident when another vehicle made an illegal U-turn in front of their car.

“Again, the settlement doesn’t make up for the loss the family suffered, but it does offer them a measure of justice,” Slomski declared.

Dealing with such weighty life-and-death matters on a regular basis has given Slomski a special appreciation for the importance of striking a proper work-life balance, especially since his wife, Helen Santilli, has a demanding job as a bankruptcy attorney with Lane & Nach in Phoenix.

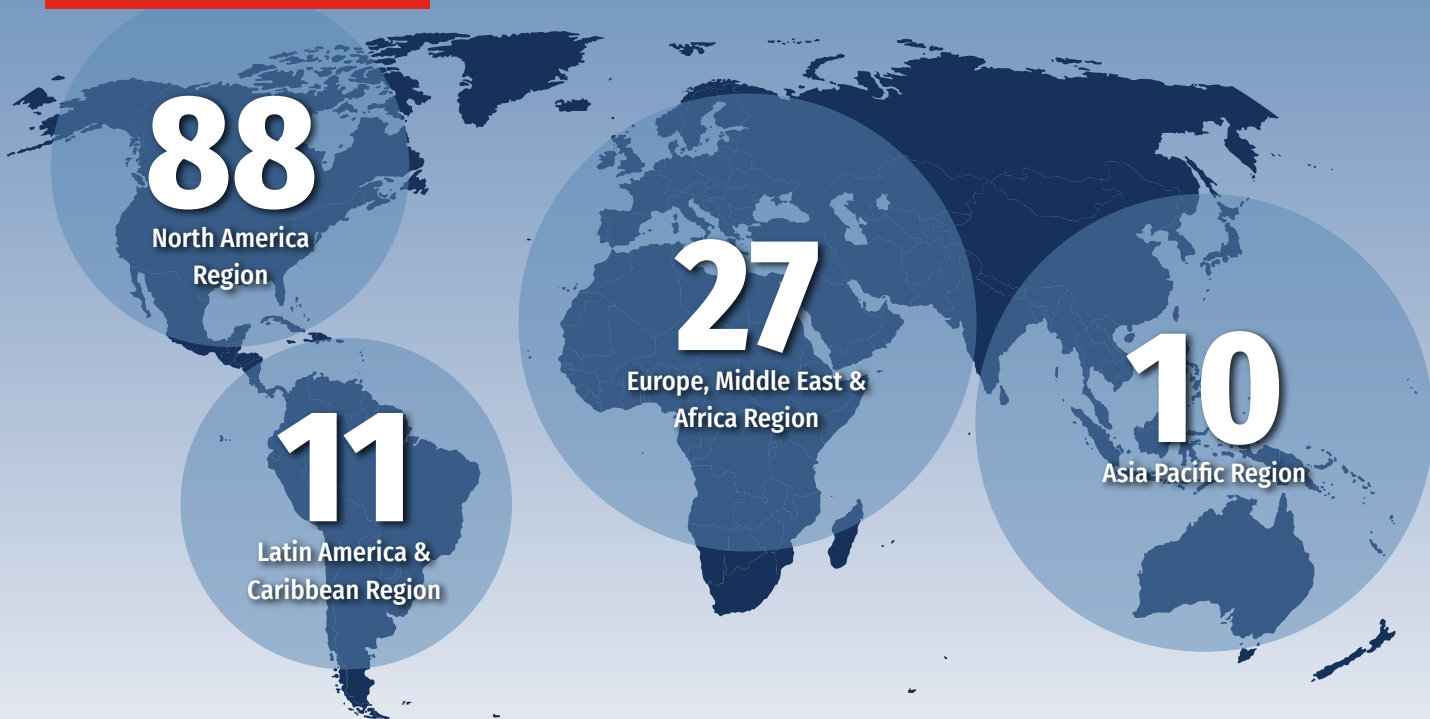
The couple, who met in law school, were married in the COVID year of 2020 in their back yard. Among those on hand for the low-key ceremony was the couple’s then newly-acquired dog, a mini-Australian shepherd named Roo.

“Both of our firms have an exceptional focus on work-life balance, recognizing how important a factor it is in a demanding profession like the law,” said Slomski. “It allows us to enjoy travel, which is one of our favorite hobbies. We have had the privilege of working for firms where we could take 16 days off to go to Italy one year and to take two weeks off to go to Amsterdam last year. I had e-mails from my now partners, but bosses at the time, telling me to stop looking at my e-mails while on vacation. That’s really unheard of.

“We got very, very lucky to be in places that understand the need for a good work-life balance and a philosophy that creates a happier employee, breeds loyalty, and makes you a better attorney because you don’t have the pent-up stress that you might otherwise have.” 



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