



Arguing for the Dead and Injured: Miami Litigator Robert Boyers on the Horrors of Negligence Cases

"Unless I allow myself to become immersed in the pain that the family or person I represent is experiencing, I'm never going to be able to tell that story in a compelling way," said Robert Boyers, founding shareholder of Boyers Law Group in Miami, who's seen all manner of doom and gloom as a civil litigator.

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By Raychel Lean



Robert Boyers of Boyers Law Group in Miami.

Miami civil litigator **Robert Boyers** invites pain, horror and grief to pull up a chair in his office every day.

He's worked with the family of a baby killed by a defective crib; the family of a woman whose doctors didn't realize her gastric bypass surgery caused a hernia that twisted her intestines; and the family of Playboy model Paula Sladewski, found dead and burned in a Miami dumpster days after bouncers had kicked her boyfriend out of Club Space, leaving her alone.

Unfortunately, Boyers could go on. And yes, it bothers him.

"But I never want to lose that, because unless I allow myself to become immersed in the pain that the family or person I represent is experiencing, I'm never going to be able to tell that story in a compelling way," said Boyers, founding shareholder of Boyers Law Group.

One civil rights case saw Boyers sue Fort Pierce police for the family of an African American man who drowned after being pulled over for a broken tail light. It took the man a while to pull over, likely because he'd suffered a police beating before, according to Boyers.

After a low-speed chase, the man — a carpenter heading back from a construction site — got out. Boyers had to piece together what happened next.

"[The police] say he ran through a yard to a canal, jumped in the canal and miraculously drowned in the middle of this canal without any physical contact with them. But this was a man who was from the Bahamas and used to teach kids how to swim," Boyers said. "We didn't believe he just drowned for no reason."

An autopsy found superficial bruising — no foul play. But when Boyers' clients paid for a second autopsy, dissecting parts of the body the prior coroner hadn't, evidence of serious internal hemorrhaging emerged. Witnesses followed, claiming police had chased and beaten the man before he jumped, struggled to swim and drowned while police watched him from the embankments.

The resulting federal lawsuit was far from straightforward. One day, the sole African American juror, a disabled elderly woman, nearly quit.

“She came in one day during the trial almost in tears and said the local police had stopped her for speeding,” Boyers said. “She thought that she was potentially being intimidated by the police.”

The judge convinced her to continue, but after two hours of deliberation it emerged one juror had heard another saying how nice it was that a defendant deputy sheriff had helped her with her car when it broke down outside the courthouse.

“We felt we couldn’t get a fair trial here, where these jurors had to sit in judgment of these officers who were then going to be patrolling their streets the day after they delivered a verdict,” Boyers said.

It looked like potential jury tampering, according to Boyers, so the judge declared a mistrial and agreed to transfer the case to Miami.

Boyers later found footage of the jurors’ traffic stop, showing officers had ignored cars that were going faster. He also discovered that the 911 audio tape the defense relied on appeared to have been tampered with. The case settled for \$900,000 — the best outcome in Boyers’ eyes, all “crazy happenings” considered.



Robert Boyers. Courtesy photo.

Boyers has secured more than \$100 million for clients in total, but his larger aim is to avoid anyone else suffering their fate, pushing hospitals, corporations and manufacturers to change their policies and warning labels in response to his lawsuits.

“I get a great deal of gratification from knowing I’m not only helping this family, I’m helping families who I’ll never meet, because I’m making institutions and corporations behave in a more responsible way by virtue of holding them accountable,” Boyers said.

He’s appeared on television shows and often speaks with community groups about how people can protect themselves from crime or negligent security, and coaches doctors on preventing malpractice.

Boyers tried serious criminal cases early in his career, as assistant district attorney in Queens, New York, then took on civil litigation in Manhattan. He moved to Florida in 1996, eventually becoming president of the Miami-Dade County Trial Lawyers Association and sitting with the board of directors for the Florida Justice Association and the Dade County Bar.

But his first introduction to law was at the dinner table in 1970s Brooklyn, where his father and grandfather — both trial lawyers — would serve up legal hypotheticals between mouthfuls. There’d be a stabbing on the street, for instance, where only one person had caught a glimpse of the incident before a train passed by.

“I was supposed to cross-examine the sole witness on behalf of the defense, to see if I could undermine that person’s testimony based on their limited capacity to observe the perpetrator who they later identified,” Boyers said. “What you’re doing to some extent is you’re giving your closing argument through the mouth of that witness.”

Boyers' parents cast large shadows. His mother was a teacher and activist who spent her life fighting to improve New York's education system and teachers' benefits while his father, Seymour Boyers, wore many hats, becoming a respected trial and appellate judge, civil litigator, author, city councilman, state legislator and lecturer. He was also one of the founders of New York's first public law school, CUNY School of Law. Seymour Boyers died in January.

With Boyers' twins now in ninth grade, they're doing great academically, but what he's most proud of is the times they've stood up for kids being bullied.

"I really admire that in them," Boyers said.

It reminds him of someone.

"My father was very accomplished in so many ways, but he drew strength and was energized by being around other people and doing things to help other people," Boyers said. "If I could accomplish a fraction of what my father has to improve the lives of my clients and other people in my life I would consider myself very successful."

Robert Boyers

Born: April 1963, New York

Spouse: Amy Boyers

Children: Sasha and Benjamin

Education: Emory University School of Law, J.D., 1990; Queens College, CUNY, B.A., 1986; University at Albany, 1983.

Experience: Founding shareholder, Boyers Law Group, 2015-present; Founding shareholder, Hannon & Boyers, 2005-2015; Shareholder, Leesfield Leighton Rubio Mahfood & Boyers, 1996-2005; Assistant District Attorney, Queens County, New York, 1993-1996; Associate, Damashek Godosky & Gentile, 1990-1993

