



## The Stories of My Father

By Lizzie Pannill Fletcher

My dad is a talented storyteller. My fondest memories of him as a child involve him reading me books and telling me stories. True stories. Fantastical stories. Personal stories. Storytelling, I came to learn, is also his delivery vehicle for the quintessential dad activity: giving advice.

Before he became an oil and gas lawyer, my dad, Bill Pannill, was a newspaper reporter. And he never lost his newspaperman ways—especially in speaking and writing. His stories are filled with facts and details, with depth of the people and places he describes. His sentences are short.

As I was leaving for college, my dad told me a story about signing up for an interesting-sounding class in law school only to find that it was a total bore. He also said he'd dreaded a required class that turned out to be his favorite. What accounted for this? The professors. One made even the dullest topic fascinating, while the other gave no life to something that should have been interesting. Dad's advice: Don't take the class, take the professor.



Though I didn't always take his recommendations at that age, I followed this one and I never regretted it. I carry this wisdom with me today. It applies to much more than choosing courses.

A few years later, after I finished with college and was thinking about my career, I told my dad I was interested in going back to school for a graduate degree in history or public policy or possibly law school. What did he think? I should have known the answer since my dad was a third-generation lawyer. For as long as I can remember, my dad said I should



be a lawyer. So at this particular guidance-seeking lunch, he took the opportunity to tell me more stories about his life as a lawyer, and what he loved about it. It was true I'd always known he loved his work. And he gave me another piece of useful advice that day: Law is history; law is public policy; and if those are the things that interest and inspire you, be a lawyer.

I took that advice, too. In the years that I have been in practice, I have seen how true that is. I have had the opportunity to work on precedent-setting cases, on cases whose outcomes have made it into legislative debate. And I have been lucky to work with clients whose stories are important to the intersection of real lives and policy making. This is especially true in the non-compete cases I work on regularly, but it is always applicable.

What I didn't know when I started is that lawyers are storytellers. I should have known this, of course. That's what my dad does so well. But the story—the detail, the arc, and the substance—are what we spend our days crafting. Of course we read the cases and statutes, and we master causes of action and rules of evidence. But our jobs are to tell people's stories—and to tell them in a way that makes sense in this framework. It is history. It is public policy. And it is about the people. It is what my dad told me.

And so it makes sense to me now that my dad is such a good storyteller. Each of his three children is a storyteller now, too. My oldest sister is a journalist, now teaching the craft to high school students. My middle sister is a novelist. And I am a lawyer. Others often see what my sisters and I do as being very different. But I don't. Each of us tells stories—stories that need to be told.

*Lizzie Pannill Fletcher is a commercial litigator and partner with Houston-based Ahmad, Zavitsanos, Anaipakos, Alavi & Mensing, or AZA, and is a candidate for Congress in Texas' Seventh Congressional District in 2018.*