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Raso Makes Her Own Destiny by Advocating for What's Right

Oradellian Silvana Raso and her family fled Communist Romania and eventually wound up in the USA with a dream of a better life

By Eamon Harbord

For many, the prospect of leaving home for a better life follows a specific path - go to school, move out on your own and make a living. Silvana Raso did things a little different because at the age of two, she and her parents left all of their belongings in Communist Romania and fled to South Africa. Eight years later they came to California and moved around the states before she found herself in Oradell in the early 1990s.

A partner at law firm Schepisi & McLaughlin in Englewood Cliffs, she has dedicated her law career as an advocate for family law including protecting domestic abuse victims and neglected children.

"I was two when we left for South Africa so I don't remember much of it, but it was just myself, my mother and father with nothing but the clothes on our backs," Raso said. "My grandfather was imprisoned in Romania many times for speaking out against the government."

Until the age of ten, Silvana and her parents lived in South Africa but due to the unrest caused by apartheid, they once again packed their bags and this time traveled across the ocean to California to start over once again.

"My father was a mechanical engineer so we moved around from California to Seattle and eventually landed in Texas," Raso said. "He had to continually restart his career so he was going from job to job to find the best one. All that travel wasn't glamorous because we were trying to survive.

"I put myself through college and law school because my parents could not afford it," she continued. "I drifted towards law because learning right from wrong and the laws in place was very much in the forefront of family discussions because we had been personally affected by unfair laws and an unfair government."

By the age of 24, Raso had earned her law degree from Syracuse University College of Law and eventually wound her way to New Jersey with her husband Marc. From there, she joined Schepisi & McLaughlin where she has spent her entire law career and worked her way up to partner.

"I wanted a job where I could create my own destiny rather than rely on a corporate structure," Raso said. "It may be idealistic, but my parents' experiences of moving around and fighting what is right attracted me to law. Watching what they went through, I saw how people can be treated unfairly and that shaped my career."

Specializing in all phases of matrimonial law including divorce, custody and visitation issues, domestic violence matters, prenuptial agreements, as well as post-judgment and appellate matters, Raso is also a Court-qualified Civil Mediator and handles civil litigation and land use matters.

"Practicing in a small firm I can decide which cases I want to take and advocate for the ones I care about," Raso said. "If someone is being mistreated by an employer or their legal rights are being trampled upon, I can advocate for that person. The firm actually represented my father in a case after he was terminated from his job following a cancer diagnosis. There is a place in my heart for people treated unfairly at work because they were sick or were taking care of someone who was."

Additionally, Raso uses her expertise as an attorney to help the community. She volunteers her time representing victims of domestic violence and as a Court Appointed Special Advocate where she advocates for neglected and abused children in the foster care system, with the goal of finding them permanent homes.

"I care very much about CASA," Raso said. "There are a disturbing number of kids in the foster care system with no one standing up for them. The firm also volunteers to help victims of domestic violence violent for court orders."

Along with advocating for children in the foster care system and domestic abuse victims, Raso will also now be turning her attention to advocating for victims of bullying in the school system.

"It's a recently developed area of the law that is related to bullying," Raso said. "People are bullied for being different, looking different, sounding different and it's no longer acceptable. I could have a client come in with a child that has been bullied at school and the district may not do something about it. I can do something about that."

Raso who is fluent in Romanian, has been admitted to the bars of the State of New Jersey and New York, U.S. District Court of New Jersey, the Third Circuit Court of Appeals as well as the Southern and Eastern Districts of the U.S. District Courts of New York.

She is a frequent commentator in print, broadcast and online media outlets including Fox, ABC, Bloomberg/BusinessWeek, News 12 and "The Insana Quotient" radio program discussing business mediation and matrimonial law matters including pre-nuptial agreements and divorce.