

Raising The Bar

Stephen L. Snyder is a tough litigator with a tender heart.



There is a continuous flame burning inside of Stephen L. Snyder. At its peak, it is fiery, and at its low point, it is an orange smoldering cinder. Its fuel combusts somewhere in a place inside this 57-year-old man where a desire to be respected and a longing to be loved meet. It's a place searching for an unsure level of comfort.

Maybe it comes from his modest upbringing as a child growing up on Dorset Place, an easily missed connection between Fallstaff and Labyrinth. You know, semi-detached homes in the busy 1960s shadow of Epstein's and the garlic-onion smells of Louise's and early morning wafts from Silber's Bakery. This is when kids played stickball on the Fallstaff Elementary School blacktop. Hitting the screen on the bottom of the chalk box with a "pinkie" ball, that was the sweet spot. The alleys, lined with dented silvery trash pails and faded painted house numbers, were more orderly than most city streets are today.

It was also a world where, myth has it, middle-class Baltimore kids were told mostly what they couldn't do, what they'd never achieve.

Some bought it. They'd never see the inside of a Stevenson house. Anything out by Caves Road was, at best, a ride in the country.

Steve Snyder, successful attorney, philanthropist, husband and father, knows the roads back to Dorset Place. He's driven them and appreciated them, making sure they'll never look entirely unfamiliar. It is part of his burn. He lives in a 21,000-square-foot mansion with an indoor swimming pool off of Park Heights extended. He is proud of his house, and he loves to show it and share it.

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“The goal [of the ad] was to get a few limited calls with an audience that would normally not think of calling me.”

Stephen Snyder



He also remembers people who looked at him with an eye that said, “You’ll never make it.” Sometimes, he permitted their disbelief into his own belief system.

He attended Fallstaff Elementary School, Pimlico Junior High and City. To pay his way through University of Baltimore Law School, he sold magazine subscriptions, thousands of dollars of subscriptions. Don’t just read that line, “He sold magazine subscriptions.” Think of that line, think it through. Magazine subscription sales are nothing less than the benchmark of sales rejection. Mr. Snyder paid for law school on the back of *Readers Digests*, *Time* magazines and perhaps *Wall Street Journals*. Now, people buy publications looking to read about him.

Steve Snyder has made it in anybody’s book. He’s known as an attorney with brash and guts. He angers his opponents with his bravado.

That confidence was seen nationally when he recently placed full-page advertisements in *The New York Times* and *Wall Street Journal* seeking a \$1 billion case. The ad read simply, “Guess what a Big 4 accounting firm did after I beat them in a \$185 million corporate conflicts case? They hired me, of course.”

The ad then boldly asks, “If you have a billion-dollar set of facts, call the man *The National Law Journal* has recognized as one of the nation’s top litigators.” Those interested are advised to call his Pikesville office or go to SnyderWins.com. There, the Web site asks three yes-or-no questions. “Do you have a billion-dollar set of facts? Is the target’s conduct egregious? Can the target afford to pay if you win.”

Answer no to any of these three questions, and you are taken to a screen showing Mr. Snyder in a Jacuzzi. On the screen is written, “Sorry, Mr. Snyder is in a meeting. He’ll get back to you, uh, never.”

If a prospective client answers yes to the three questions, he is directed to a home page. Reaction to the ad campaign, said Mr. Snyder, was “overwhelming. The goal was to get a few limited calls with an audience that would normally not think of calling me,” he said.

Mr. Snyder received more than 100 calls. He’s looking into two of them. Meanwhile, he’s getting media attention across the nation. Court TV has called, as well as other newspapers and magazines.

What drives someone to do this?

“It’s complicated,” he said. “Where do I go from here? I’ve been able to master any specialty with extensive study. Because I’m flashy, I’ve got to be able to back it up with substance. To get a reputation that is national in scope, you need a high degree of credibility. I’m looking for one big case. I want to tell a story that unfolds into a \$1 billion case. For someone to hire me, they need to take a deep breath. It’s going to the next level. Everyone thinks I’m nuts. But if I’m willing to pay \$1 million in this campaign, it must be legit.

“I want one big case,” he added. “There is the potential of doing something with a little more notoriety.”

Here’s where the burn comes in yet again. Because by anyone’s standards, his track record is already impressive.

Mr. Snyder was hired by the Federal Deposit Insurance Co. in claims against Ernst & Young regarding Superior Bank’s failure. He settled the case for \$125

million. He won a \$276 million verdict against First Union National. He won a \$185 million settlement for the Merry-Go-Round bankruptcy estate and \$106 million against United Cable.

He drives a Rolls Royce, and his watch has more diamonds than Major League Baseball.

Every hair is in place. His skin is smooth, lightly tanned. He’s a handsome, strong man. It all has a purpose. Dress like a success, drive a car that oozes success, wear a timepiece, not a watch; then clients, jurors, opposing attorneys all know who is entering the room.

“He’s a superb lawyer with incredible results,” said Prince George’s Court of Appeals Judge Howard Chasanow. “He is clearly someone with a conscience who wants to do good. Trial attorneys have so much riding on their skills that they tend to define themselves with huge egos. You almost have to if you’re going to succeed.”

“I’ve tried to create a unique style,” said Mr. Snyder. “I am a bulldog, but at the end of the day, I think the vast majority of jurors have genuinely liked us. I want them to take a position on me.”

Everyone seemed to have a position on Mr. Snyder when he was the kid attending Fallstaff, Pimlico Junior High and then City College.

“I had a big mouth,” he said. “Later, that became my biggest asset. I didn’t apply myself academically throughout high school. I began to see the light in both college and law school, and ultimately graduated magna cum laude, second highest in the school. It was willpower. I wanted to be something.”

He says his mother, Elaine, 77, is the only person who “loves me more than my wife.”

“I want to be as tough as I can be and still well-liked,” he said.

One source said that “tough” and “well-liked” are a battleground of sorts for Mr. Snyder, that he looks to find a way to be both simultaneously.

He became a bar mitzvah at Chizuk Amuno Congregation. He has been a member of Beth El Congregation for some 40 years.

Last summer, he paid for the writing of a Torah for Beth El. It was an honor that the Pikesville synagogue’s Rabbi Mark G. Loeb said held a level of almost unparalleled significance for Mr. Snyder.

“I think he’s an extraordinarily competent attorney,” said Rabbi Loeb. “He’s tenacious, and he works hard at what he does. If I were in trouble, I’d want him on my side.

“To many people,” continued Rabbi Loeb, “he’s something of an enigma. He’s obviously flamboyant. But don’t let that fool you. He’s a very serious person, and he’s very smart. I think he’s got a good heart. And like many people who are seen a lot in public, there’s a lot more than you think you see. He enjoys doing good things. He was the principal dedicator of our new Torah last year, and I could tell it meant a great deal to him. It was something he was very proud to do.”

But there is another issue troubling him. Sometimes he has trouble fitting into his own Jewish skin.

“We as a people sometimes treat others in a condescending way,” he said. Confidence now gives way

to anger. He is sitting behind the expansive boardroom table looking outside for a few moments. The laminated magazine articles, enlarged checks, testimonial letters all hanging from the walls almost look down at him, trying to empower. He is off somewhere, angry. There is a silence. It feels awkward.

He breaks it.

“People sometimes equate money with success, and that shouldn’t be,” he said. “Jewish people were chosen, not because we are better but because we were supposed to be more tolerant to those different than us, and to those less fortunate. We’ve distorted it.”

When his wife’s church needed to be painted, Mr. Snyder paid for it. He and his wife, Julie, were honored for that deed and others they’ve done for her Catholic church.

He’s been the Israel Bonds chair at Beth El, the chairman of the Mazon organization, and he worked on Rabbi Loeb’s 25th anniversary celebration. In recent years, he was honored by the Baltimore Zionist District and “shared” a Martin’s West stage via tele-hookup with former Jerusalem Mayor Ehud Olmert.

There are other charitable efforts as well. Perhaps the most well-known was the \$2.5 million he gave to the Cerebral Palsy Foundation. He pledged the contribution on the Internet, using his American Express card. In the year 2000, on the 30th anniversary of his graduation from the University of Baltimore Law School, he donated \$1 million to create the Stephen L. Snyder

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Stephen Snyder, in his office, has won several major cases. “I’ve tried to create a unique style,” he says. “I am a bulldog.”

Snyder Facts

- 1970 University of Baltimore Law School graduate
- Assistant State’s Attorney
- Senior partner at Snyder, Slutkin & Kopec
- Five children (four sons and one daughter) — two sons are members of the Maryland Bar and practice in his law firm
- Honored by University of Baltimore for establishing the Stephen L. Snyder Center for Litigation Skills
- Obtained largest civil recovery arising out of a bankruptcy setting — \$185 million against Ernst & Young
- Reached a \$100 million-plus settlement against United Cable Television Corp. in a case involving allegation of fraud and racial discrimination
- Awarded \$25 million in punitive damages against Bell Atlantic Corp.

Other Snyderisms

- Favorite hobby: Loves to play golf
- Favorite movie: “Cape Fear”
- Favorite music: “Pavarotti, Oldies”
- Favorite sport to watch: Football

IN AN IVORY TOWER FAR BEYOND THE REACHES OF MORTAL MEN LIVES...

SNYDERMAN

... A SUPERHERO OF INCREDIBLE STRENGTH AND LEGAL SAVVY, WHO USES HIS CREATIVE IMAGINATION AND COURTROOM SKILLS TO PROTECT CORPORATIONS AND INDIVIDUALS AGAINST MISCONDUCT.

I LOVE THAT MAN.

FEATURING PRUDENCE JURIS SNYDERMAN'S FAITHFUL ASSISTANT

EVILDOERS BEWARE!

VICTA!* CROC!* GO AND DO YOUR EVIL DEEDS, BOYS!

YES, MASTER.

*VICTA MIZATION & CROC D. CONFLICTO ARE THE COUNT'S LOYAL HENCHMEN.

CREATED BY A. COUNT CONFLICTO, A VILLAIN WHO THRIVES ON GENERATING CONFLICTS OF INTEREST WITHIN GIANT CORPORATIONS AND NATIONAL BANKS, SNYDERMAN WAS DESIGNED TO BE THE EPITOME OF EVIL.

BUT A MISCALCULATION, AND HIS HUMANITARIAN INSTINCTS TO DO GOOD, ENABLED HIM TO BREAK THE BONDS OF EVIL...AND HE HAS SINCE DEDICATED HIS LIFE TO DEFEATING CONFLICTO.

YOU FOOLS! YOU GAVE HIM THE WILL TO DO GOOD!

TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THIS SUPERHERO AND THE REAL-LIFE EXPLOITS OF HIS ALTER EGO, VISIT WWW.SNYDERMAN.BIZ

NO ONE KNOWS HOW TO CONTACT OUR HERO, BUT WHEREVER JUSTICE & LARGE JURY AWARDS ARE NEEDED, SNYDERMAN WON'T BE FAR AWAY.

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Center for Litigation Advocacy.

"Mr. Snyder has been an extremely charitable supporter of United Cerebral Palsy of Central Maryland (UCP), making a \$2 million pledge to UCP several years ago and generously supporting the organization through ongoing contributions," said Patricia Sandusky, President and CEO of UCP. "Additionally, Mr. Snyder has served as one of UCP's advisors, providing invaluable guidance to individuals and families seeking advice in relation to cerebral palsy and their legal rights."

All Mr. Snyder said he wanted was to be the best at everything. He dreamed of being the quarterback when he was a kid.

"I'm very high-profile," he said. "I do the opposite of what most people do. I always envied people who were successful. And I saw my way to success through education. I also knew I had a talent for speaking. I have the capacity to take a set of facts and figure out the jury. When I go before a jury, I want them to take a position on me."

He said it wasn't easy. He was married to his first wife when he was 23, and there were three children before he was 27.

The house on Dorset enters the conversation again. "I can visualize every single room in that house, every light bulb," he said.

"Steve is a very successful lawyer, a committed individual, a fine individual," said Judge Robert Bell, chief judge of the Maryland Court of Appeals. "He's a

guy who has come to a profession which is the very best, from a standpoint of making a difference. He's demonstrated that one can pursue excellence and be successful at it.

"He's a person who is confident in his own ability and doesn't apologize for it," continued Judge Bell. "But he doesn't diminish others. I've found him to be delightful, and open and willing to engage in candid and meaningful exchanges, demanding nothing."

Not everyone shares these feelings. Yet, if they aren't necessarily fond of the man, they still admire his accomplishments.

"He's an egomaniac," said one longtime member of the area's legal community who didn't want to be identified. "I've had some of my most unpleasant courtroom experiences that I can remember with him. He thinks he's God's gift to litigation. But while I say that, there's something about him that relates to the average juror. Jurors love him, and I can't figure out why. Also, he's got a lot of good people working with him. But the bottom line is, he's the one who attracts the big clients and wins these cases. You have to give him his due."

"I think Steve Snyder is a fabulous trial lawyer," said area attorney Frank Burch. "He's ferocious in his dedication to his clients' interests. He's got great instincts. He's got guts. He's got great judgment. He understands something lots of trial lawyers don't understand. Winning a jury trial is not a college bowl, it's not about winning a lot of issues on points. It's about a few core things. It's about driving those themes at an emotional level."

Mr. Snyder has been known to become so emotional

"Snyderman" is the cartoon strip that Stephen L. Snyder commissioned to explain who he is and to promote his work.

before a jury that he'll sometimes cry.

And he has that same connection to cause when it comes to his philanthropic endeavors.

"I feel it's important for me to step up to the plate when I can," he said. "I'm very proud that I'm Jewish. As a people we are very family-oriented, and education is stressed to our children. If you are educated, there's nobody who can take advantage of you. I thank God for having a healthy family. I thank God for my success, and I thank God for being able to donate money to different causes."

This is the man who describes himself as having a "tough veneer" as having a reputation for being a "bulldog."

He even has a cartoon strip called "Snyderman" drawn to tell his story. It begins, "In an ivory tower far beyond the reaches of mortal men lives Snyderman, a superhero of incredible strength and legal savvy, who uses his creative imagination and courtroom skills to protect corporations and individuals against misconduct."

But as a person who might not think of him as a superhero, but still respects him, said, "Yes, the veneer is tough, but on the inside, he's a giver. And we're all better off for it." □