



# Christopher Zachar

By Rebecca Larsen

**W**hen Christopher Zachar arrived as a first-year student at The John Marshall Law School in Chicago in the summer of 1989, his inclination was that he didn't want to be a "courtroom attorney."

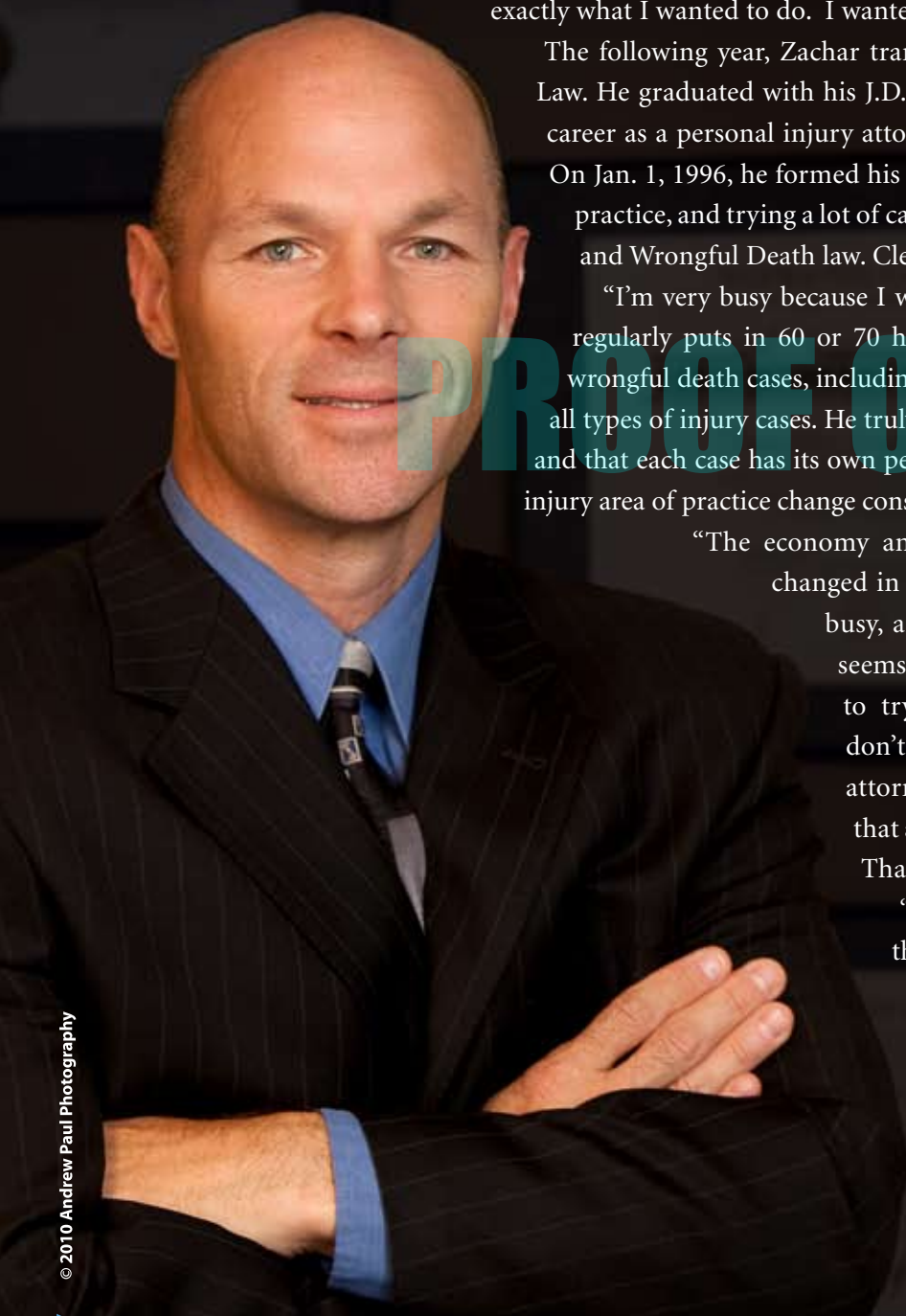
"But then, like all first-year students, I was assigned to write and argue a moot court brief," he explains. "I found that I just absolutely loved standing up in court, taking a position and arguing it. By the end of my first year, I knew exactly what I wanted to do. I wanted to litigate."

The following year, Zachar transferred to the University of Arizona College of Law. He graduated with his J.D. in 1992, and after passing the bar, has spent his career as a personal injury attorney with a great enthusiasm for litigating cases. On Jan. 1, 1996, he formed his own law firm in north Phoenix. After 10 years in practice, and trying a lot of cases, Zachar became a Certified Specialist in Injury and Wrongful Death law. Clearly, he is very proud of this accomplishment.

"I'm very busy because I work very hard and I like being busy," he says. He regularly puts in 60 or 70 hours a week, exclusively on personal injury and wrongful death cases, including motor vehicle collisions, premises accidents and all types of injury cases. He truly enjoys that each day brings different experiences and that each case has its own personalities and nuances. He has seen the personal injury area of practice change considerably in Arizona over the last 18 years.

"The economy and the legal climate in Arizona have definitely changed in the last few years. We are doing our best to stay busy, and it requires a great deal of time and effort. It seems there are more law firms and attorneys willing to try their hand at a personal injury case. Many don't realize how specialized this area of law is. Many attorneys believe that this area of the law is easy, and that anyone can do it. They think, 'a rear end collision? That seems easy.'"

"OK, try one", says Zachar, "and see how 'easy' they are. The insurance companies seem to fight everything these days. They fight liability. They fight causation. They hire biomechanical experts to say that the impact was not serious. They hire medical experts to say the client was not hurt. They blame everyone standing within earshot. Even at the time the case resolves, a great deal of work still needs to be performed. Health insurance liens, balance billing liens, Medicare





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liens, and so forth ... Are they related? Properly filed? Valid? All these things need to be investigated, verified, and negotiated. Each case is different. Each client is different. Each adjuster is different. The details are very important, and learning how best to handle each circumstance takes a lot of time and experience.”

While many clients find him directly, a significant portion of Zachar’s practice is complex personal injury/wrongful death and litigation referrals from other attorneys. These referrals come from attorneys who may not have the expertise in injury and death cases, attorneys who are too busy for a particular case, as well as attorneys who know that a case will require litigation, but don’t want to handle it themselves. Regardless of the origin of the case, Zachar approaches every situation from the beginning as if it will go to court.

“From the day a case comes in, we handle it as if it will go to trial,” he says. “We prepare as if we are going to court. The defense attorneys know that and the insurance

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companies know that. They know that we are not afraid to try the case, and that we will do just that if needed to obtain a fair resolution.”

In Zachar’s opinion, it is imperative the other side knows it. “Otherwise,” he says, “the result will always disfavor my client.”

“Chris works very, very hard,” says his paralegal, Heidi Kelsch, with the firm for 13 years. “He gets up at 4 a.m. and is in the office by 5:30 every morning. He pushes hard to get the best possible outcome for his clients. He’s very driven; he’s a type-A-plus personality, always

striving to do more.” (She sighs, and laughs.) “But that motivated persona never gets in the way of Zachar reaching out to clients to explore their cases and help them with their problems.”

“His favorite part of the job is talking with clients, and making sure they understand the process,” she says. “Sometimes he takes on the little cases that other lawyers think are not worth doing, just to help people, and he works on those cases exactly the same way as he works the big cases.”

Communicating with clients is essential, Zachar says. “We know that lack of communication is the number one reason for client dissatisfaction. We try to remember that every day. We understand our responsibilities to keep clients informed, even if keeping them informed means telling them that they may not hear from us for awhile for procedural reasons.”

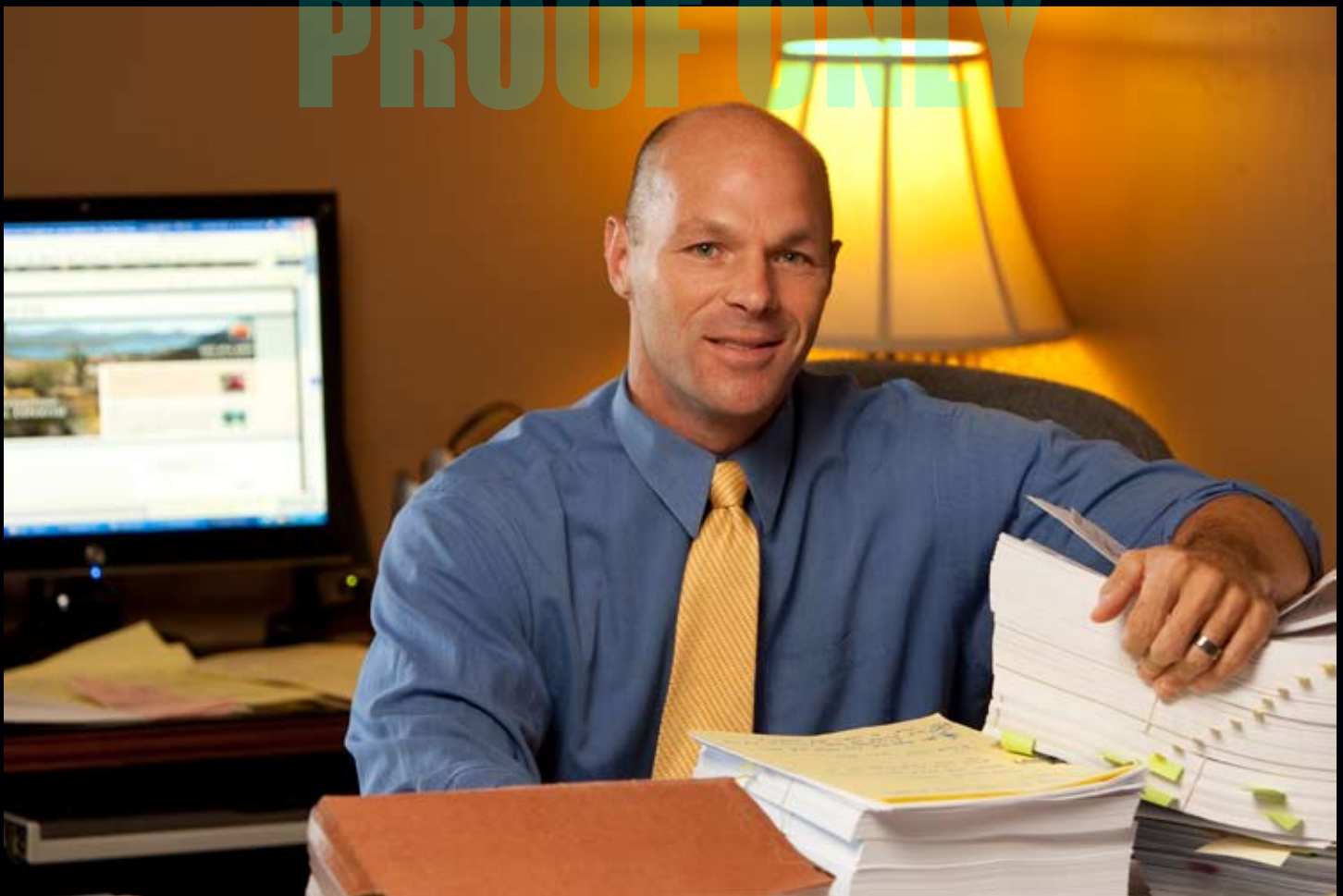
He adds, “A lot of what I do is to keep clients informed of their options along the way. If they want to settle, I want to make sure that they have all the information they need,

and that they are settling for the right reasons.” However, he does not push them: “It is ultimately their decision. I don’t want to make them do something they don’t want to do. I just want to make sure that they understand the entire process, so that their decision is well-informed, and the right choice for them.”

In two remodeled buildings on East Thunderbird Road, he has created a comfortable home-like suite of offices that have been tastefully decorated. “It’s not the classic law office. We want our clients to feel comfortable,” he says. “We want to alleviate their fears and concerns, because a lot of them have never been involved with a lawyer before. We want to provide them assurance that in the end, everything will be OK, and that we will do everything we can to make it so. We want them to be comfortable from the minute they walk in the door.”

However, it is clear in speaking to Zachar that he truly loves what he does, and, that he is committed to the task. You can almost see his mind at work.

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The conversation then turns to some of his “successes”:

“I was representing a woman in a slip-and-fall case”, he begins. “It was a difficult case, and the client and I had not seen eye-to-eye on all matters. We had been in litigation for over a year by the time we arbitrated the case. We received a favorable decision, and I called the client and her husband to inform them of the result, and what it would net them. They told me the amount to them was unacceptable. I thought, ‘Oh my, here we go.’ What happened next still amazes me to this day. They said: ‘It is not fair that WE are getting more than YOU are. You helped us when no one else would. We will agree to resolve the case, so long as you agree to increase your fee to the same amount you are giving to us.’

“Now, honestly”, says Zachar, laughing, “we don’t hear that every day.”

The case settled. To the present day, that is one of his

proudest moments. “It was not a big case by any means, but it is one that I will remember for the rest of my life.”

In March 2010, Zachar and his wife traveled to Washington, D.C., where he was sworn in as a member of the U.S. Supreme Court. “It was awe-inspiring”, says Zachar, “just to be in the courtroom. We were talking to the Clerk beforehand, and then, things got quiet and the entire nine member panel was introduced and stepped up to the bench. A short while later, Chief Justice Roberts called my name, I stood and was recognized and confirmed as a member of the United States Supreme Court in front of the entire panel of justices. It was surreal, to say the least.”

Zachar is originally from Cedar Rapids, Iowa, but came West 25 years ago to enroll at Arizona State where he earned his bachelor’s degree in political science in 1989. “Iowa was a great place to grow up, but at the time it was economically depressed, and I didn’t see myself getting to

where I wanted to be by staying there,” he says.

Zachar begins his days very early, so that he can commit the “best part of the day” to his family. After work at the office ends in the late afternoon, he heads home to have dinner and spend time with his wife, Michelle, and three children, Tommy, Macrina and Danielle. Sometimes he does a couple of hours of work after the kids are in bed.

“I don’t have any structured hobbies” he says, “I’m married with children. (He laughs) I work hard, and rarely stop moving. I coach my children’s sports and try to spend as much time with family as possible. I wouldn’t want it any other way.”

He has a great love for sports as well. Cardinals, Diamondbacks, Suns -- he loves them all: “I was a die-hard Chicago Bear fan growing up in the 1970s; it doesn’t get much worse than that.” Now, each winning season for one of my teams is always appreciated. (Again, he laughs.)

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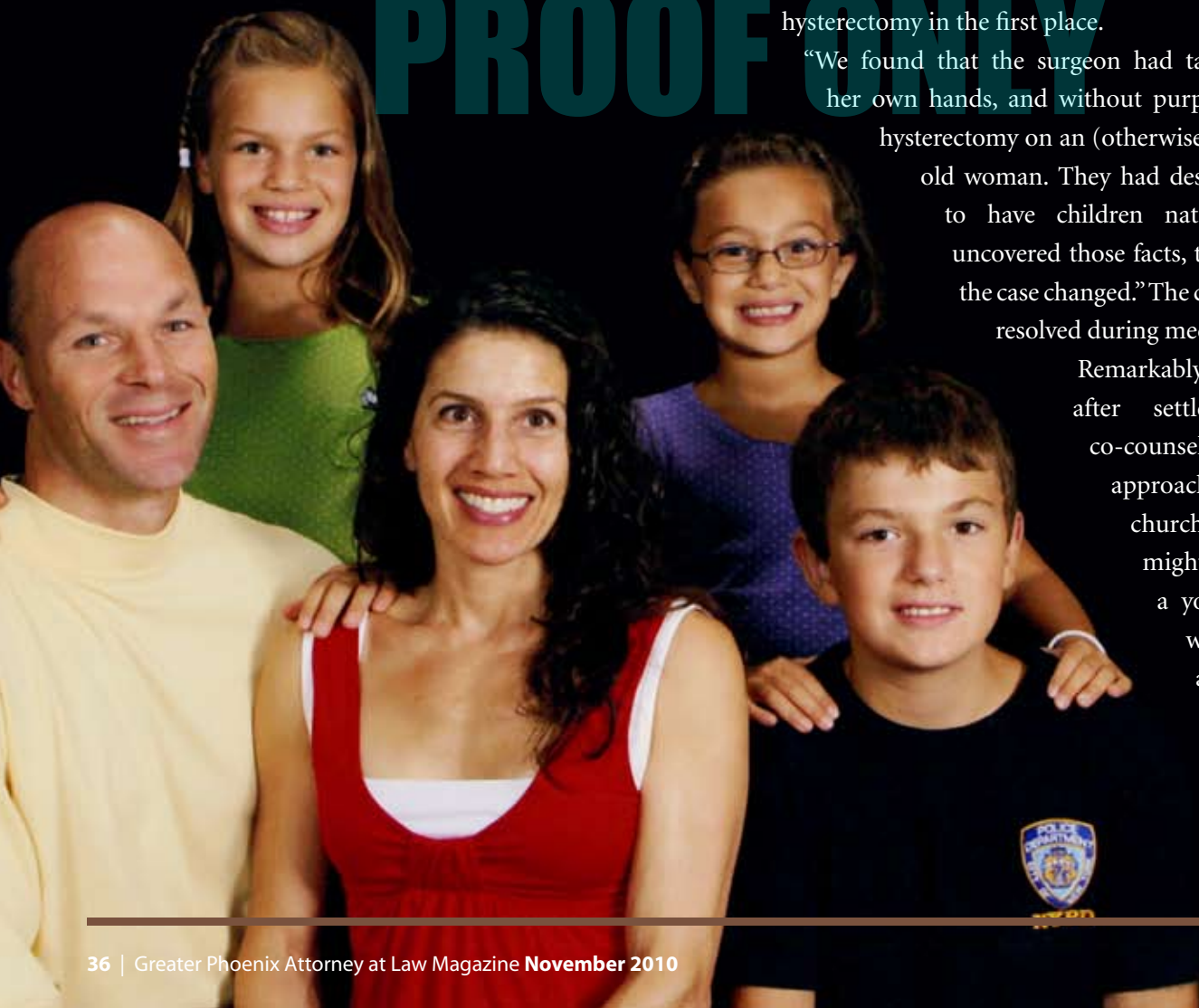
His devotion to his practice and family life shines through in talking about a prior medical malpractice case. The case involved a 29-year-old woman who had suffered additional injury during a hysterectomy and lost her right to have children naturally.

When the clients came to us, they were upset about internal injuries which had occurred during the course of a hysterectomy. We discussed the facts, and decided to order the medical records to investigate how the injuries had occurred, and whether the doctor had been negligent. However, after we received and reviewed the records, we couldn’t understand why the doctor had done the hysterectomy in the first place.

“We found that the surgeon had taken matters into her own hands, and without purpose, performed a hysterectomy on an (otherwise healthy) 29-year-old woman. They had destroyed her ability to have children naturally. Once we uncovered those facts, the entire tenor of the case changed.” The case was eventually resolved during mediation.

Remarkably, only a few days after settlement, Zachar’s co-counsel in the case was approached while leaving church and asked if he might possibly know a young couple who were interested in adopting a baby. The inquiring party knew an expecting mother who wanted to give

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up her baby, but wanted to hand-select the new parents.

“It was like heaven itself had delivered a gift to these clients,” Zachar says. The mother-to-be and the clients were soon introduced to each other. The rest of the story was like a fairy-tale ending. Zachar smiles when he says, “I still get a Christmas card from the family every year. You cannot make up endings like that.”

In talking with Chris, it is clear that he loves what he does. It is also clear from his office and office staff that his devotion to the practice is infectious -- in a very good way. “I have a great staff here, and we are very committed to our clients,” he says. “It gives us a tremendous satisfaction to help people, and it’s a nice way to earn a living. I really cannot imagine doing anything else.”



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## At a Glance

The firm’s practice areas: Personal injury and wrongful death cases and litigation, including motor vehicle and motorcycle accidents, dog bites, premises liability, recreational accidents, pedestrian accidents, construction zone accidents, injuries to children, medical and other kinds of malpractice, nursing home abuse, and defective products.

The firm’s emphasis is litigation. A significant portion of the firm’s clients are referrals from other attorneys and law firms, who need assistance with a matter destined for or already in litigation.

The firm’s principal: Christopher J. Zachar has practiced law since 1992 and began his own firm in 1996. He graduated from Arizona State University in Tempe in 1989 with a bachelor of science in political science and from the University of Arizona College of Law in Tucson in 1992 with a juris doctor degree. Zachar is licensed to practice law in all city, county and state courts in Arizona. He is admitted to practice in U.S. District Court and the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals. He is also admitted to the United States Supreme Court. He is assisted at the Zachar Law Firm by six employees.

### Memberships:

Judge Pro Tem, Maricopa County Superior Court; Lifetime Member, Arizona Trial Lawyers Association; American Association for Justice; Maricopa County Bar Association; State Bar of Arizona, United States Supreme Court.

### Accomplishments:

Certified Specialist in Injury and Wrongful Death; SuperLawyers of the Southwest (2007, 2008, 2009, 2010); American Trial Lawyers Association Top 100 Lawyers (2010); Arizona Trial College (1994); Gerry Spence Trial seminar (1998).

### Family and personal:

Zachar and his wife, Michelle, have three children: Tommy, 13, Macrina, 11, and Danielle, 9. He has coached his children’s sports since they were very little and now coaches football and baseball for their school sports.