


Who Will Guard the Guards Themselves?

Personal injury lawyer
Robert Jarchi, for one

by KATHERINE GLOVER

photography by LARRY MARCUS



Robert Jarchi started out thinking he would go into environmental law and mass torts but changed his mind. “These cases often settle without trial and there is little time for in-depth client contact,” he says. “You don’t have much client contact.”

Instead, he chose personal injury law. It’s allowed him to represent everyday people against corporations, police departments—“anyone who’s in power and thinks they can get away with picking on the little guy.”

He’s found a good fit at Greene Broillet & Wheeler, where a sign on the wall reads, “*Quis custodiet ipsos custodes?*”—“Who will guard the guards themselves?”

“That’s kind of how we see our job here,” Jarchi says. “We’re like one of the branches of responsibility that checks on power.”

Jarchi first walked into Greene Broillet & Wheeler shortly after finishing law school—without an appointment. He’d compiled a list of firms that were doing the type of work he wanted to do, and he was hoping to show up and ask some of the lawyers how they’d gotten to where they were.

Luck was on Jarchi’s side that day; founding partner Browne Greene was standing in the lobby when he walked in. Jarchi told Greene he wanted to talk to him about how he got into this business, and Greene invited him to wait for him in the lobby while he took a deposition, which Jarchi did. For six hours.

“I just knew that this was the area I wanted to go into and I was willing to wait,” Jarchi says. “So I waited.”

The wait was worth it—not long afterwards, Jarchi was hired as a law clerk, and about a year later, he became an

associate. Since then he’s brought in millions of dollars for his clients and worked on several high-profile cases that drew national media attention, including a \$33 million judgment for a black neurosurgeon who, after a brutal run-in with police, suffered nerve damage and could no longer operate unassisted.

At 35, Jarchi has begun to develop some expertise in brain injury cases. “There are a lot of new advances that are taking place,” he says. “There are subtle brain injuries out there and these new scans are allowing us to better understand these injuries and better show them to the jury.”

Of course, for some—including some jurors—personal injury cases are more closely associated with frivolous lawsuits than with fighting the good fight. “To some extent there has been an effort by the tort reformists to make people think every case is like the McDonald’s coffee cup case,” Jarchi says, referring to the woman who was awarded damages because her coffee was too hot. She sustained serious injuries; nevertheless, the case is often held up as an example of overdone judgments.

Still, Jarchi has faith in the system. “The important thing is to try to get the jurors to look at the facts, to understand how this case is important to them and their community,” he says.

In fact, Jarchi calls the jury system “a perfect mini-democracy.” He studied political science before switching to law but politics didn’t strike him as sufficiently egalitarian. “We only vote once every four years,” he says. But on a jury, 12 individuals directly determine the outcome of a case. “That is the best example we have of participatory democracy.” ◀