

# Susan Novosad

## Fierce Advocate for Injured Clients in Difficult Times

by Elizabeth Davies

Susan L. Novosad suspects she might have gotten her first job at **Levin & Perconti** because of her mother.

Having been laid off from her teaching job in the early 1980s due to a reduction in force, Novosad was working as a waitress. She believes her mother might have nudged her older brother to give her office work at his firm.

And so, she became his girl Friday — running errands, answering phones and getting an insider's view of the law.

“It was such a good fit that my brother encouraged me to go to law school,” says Novosad, now a partner who has represented clients in personal injury cases for more than 25 years.

“I had the wonderful experience of learning how to run a law practice and learning about the civil practice of handling personal injury cases,” she says. “It was a fabulous way to go to law school.”

It has helped turn Novosad into a woman her brother considers “among the elite female personal injury attorneys today practicing in



Chicagoland,” says Steven Levin.

Levin, who is five years older than his sister, has enjoyed working with Novosad for more than two decades. Their sibling relationship only serves to strengthen the firm, Levin says.

“Our closeness has aided us in tough times and allowed us to enjoy the successes together,” he says. “It’s a huge benefit when our loyalties toward each other can’t be questioned.”

Novosad’s parents were proud of the special relationship between the siblings that came from working together. Her father was able to see them working together prior to his death in 1993.

“They adored it,” Novosad recalls. “They’re very proud of us and of the fact that we have this special relationship and deep loyalty toward one another.”

Novosad considers her brother the best professional mentor she could have asked for. Once his secretary, today she is his partner. He says she was quick to learn and build upon anything he taught her. And Novosad has loved the process.

“Imagine a young, eager college graduate being able to be mentored by the person she always looked up to — her big brother,” she says. “We get along marvelously. Literally, we have been eating lunch together for 30 years. Who else has that?”

### Showing Compassion for PI Clients

As a teacher, the mother of three, and the only daughter of an elderly mother, Novosad has deep compassion for the clients she serves — particularly the children and the elderly. One of her very first cases involved a toddler named Stephanie White who was injured at birth, leaving her left arm with little use.

“I had just come off of teaching, and here was this young mother and baby,” Novosad recalls. “I recently had children, so I was very empathetic and sympathetic to this mother.”

The courtroom was dead silent as Novosad and her client sat on the courtroom floor during the trial, that little girl trying to tie her shoes using her right hand and her teeth. She was awarded a \$6.7 million verdict.

“It was so gratifying to see how we helped this girl and this family,” Novosad says.

Not long ago, she received an envelope in the mail from that young girl. It was her college graduation photo.

“That was very meaningful to me,” Novosad says.

Now 24 years old and running her own personal styling business in New York City, White still appreciates the work Novosad did to compensate her family for the lifestyle adjustments they needed to make as a result

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of her injury.

“Most of all, I appreciate her support,” White says. “My mother always says she was one of her main sources of support at the time... She is very gentle, yet strong and also very trustworthy.”

It’s those moments that light a fire under her newest cases, pushing her to fight harder and longer for her clients.

“Her thoroughness, preparation and toughness stand out,” Levin says. “She’s extremely aggressive on behalf of her clients, but respectful of other attorneys. She really is the total package.”

A case that stands out to Novosad ended in a \$3.5 million settlement last year, after a mom lost one of her twins from injuries sustained during delivery.

“These folks are having a hard time moving on with their lives,” she recalls. “There was an aura of sadness that permeated their lives. This gave them a little bit of closure. That, to me, is worth everything.”

Another client who felt closure after Novosad handled his case was Stephen Dewart, a man who was hit in 2011 by a City of Chicago sanitation truck while standing on a sidewalk.

Dewart’s right leg was shattered, and he has had three surgeries since then. He also had four vertebral fractures and suffered from post-traumatic stress.

“Susan took our case very seriously from day one and never doubted our ability to seek justice for what had happened,” he says. “If anything, she bolstered our confidence that their hard work would pay off.”

During the weeklong trial, Dewart was impressed with Novosad’s ability to be meticulous, patient and respectful.

“It was clear that the courtroom was Susan’s domain,” says Dewart. “She was fierce but respectful. She had a command of the details but conveyed them in a way all could understand. She was not timid about requesting that the jury hold our defendants accountable.” In the end, they did.

Dewart was awarded a \$2.4 million verdict and was even approached by jurors who wanted to hug him after the verdict was announced.

“I was moved when the jury read its verdict,” Novosad says. “You feel so validated that these 12 people he didn’t know heard Stephen’s story and wanted to compensate him.”

Some lawyers try to stay emotionally detached from clients as a way of managing the stressful problems they see day in and day out. Novosad manages it by diving all the way in.

“You can’t help but get involved in their lives,” she says. “You become part of their families, in a way. I’m able to act and do something to help them. That’s what helps you stay balanced. A lot of people feel helpless. So the action of being able to help them

balances the emotional aspect.”

In a Lake County nursing home case, Novosad was able to resolve the dispute on the eve of trial for \$1 million. The case involved an elderly woman who Novosad says was a known fall risk, but was not provided the appropriate interventions to prevent falls. As a result of a faulty bed alarm, Novosad charged that a patient fell out of bed, sustaining several fractures which, in part, led to her death.

“It was very gratifying to reach a resolution,” Novosad says. “One hopes that this type of result will change the way the nursing home operates and helps others avoid suffering the same fate.”

### Being Prepared for the Job

At 58, Novosad is the firm’s managing partner. It’s a role that falls naturally to her, as she excels at juggling several roles at once.

“As a Type-A female, I’m able to keep all the balls in the air,” she laughs. “I have the wonderful good fortune to work with many extremely competent attorneys, and John Perconti and Steve Levin are at the top of the list. I am very lucky to work with both John and Steve, who are extremely smart, excellent sounding boards, and truly dedicated to their work.”

Novosad has been accused before of being over-prepared, which she says is a fairly accurate diagnosis.

“I took it as a compliment,” she laughs. “Preparation is everything. I take that to the ultimate level. No stone goes unturned. I will not give up.”

Indeed, that’s a skill which is critical to her success, says partner and firm co-founder John Perconti.

“Susan has a work ethic of no other,” he says. “Susan will burn the midnight oil preparing for court appearances, depositions and trials. There is no task that will go unfinished. Susan is a zealous advocate for her clients and has an inherent knack for preparing her clients for deposition and trial, and maintaining client satisfaction throughout the case.”

Perconti is quick to recall a malpractice case involving a failure to diagnose sickle cell disease, resulting in the death of a child.

“She stepped in and immediately learned the case and the medicine,” he remembers. “During the main defendant doctor’s deposition, she was able to obtain key admissions, which resulted in the case settling for policy limits.”

Novosad is notable not only for her preparedness, but also for her competence and professional demeanor, says Cook County Circuit Court Judge Lynn M. Egan.

“She is always courteous and calm, no matter how difficult the situation,” Egan says. “Also, it is clear that the best interests of her client always drive her decisions.

“Ms. Novosad has excelled in every case that has been before me,” she says

### Taking Advantage of Teaching

Even with a law degree in her pocket, Novosad never has turned away from her first love of teaching. She began her career teaching gifted elementary students and sees plenty of correlations to what she does now.

“Children are sort of like cases,” she says. “Each case is different and unique, and needs individual attention. You have to really individualize the approach so you can build to its strengths.”

She also is known for taking younger lawyers under her wing and mentoring them, just like a teacher would. Levin & Perconti has 18 attorneys, 10 of whom are women.

“I want to pass on my love of the practice of law and my approach to it: I’m relentless and aggressive,” she says. “It’s a pleasure to motivate young people to do the same.”

Steven Levin calls his sister “an inspiration to the young lawyers in our firm.

“She combines the skills of paying attention to detail with having an overall view of how a firm like ours can best serve its clients,” he says. “Susan deserves huge credit for helping this firm get where it is today.”

Novosad says she has benefited from sharing her law career with her husband, Steve, an insurance defense attorney. He also is a former teacher. They met in law school and have been able to bounce ideas off of each other during their 30 years of marriage.

Their daughter, Sarah, 28, works as corporate events manager at the Chicago History Museum. She says her mom has been a great influence.

“Witnessing my mom work so hard and establish herself as a leader in her field has inspired me to strive for success in my own career,” she says. “There is no greater compliment than to be compared to my mother.”

Novosad hopes to inspire the next generation of women to balance their jobs with family. She kept a family home in suburban Deerfield while working in Chicago as a way of creating the home life they wanted for their children. Now that her youngest has graduated from college, Novosad and her husband are considering a move into the city where they work.

“I think about retirement, but because I love what I do so much, I can’t imagine not doing it anymore,” she says.

And so, even though Novosad’s mom gives her a hard time for not leaving the office until 7:30 p.m., she can’t bring herself to think of the practice of law as “work.” In fact, her biggest challenge? Not having more time to do it.

“I’m so lucky to love my job,” she says. “It gives me such joy. This is very gratifying. I hope I can continue to impact people’s lives in a positive way.” ■