

Role models help steer career of transportation law attorney

By Brian Cox

There are two strong women who are the seeds of Emily Chiarizia's legal career.

The first is her mother, Kathy, who Chiarizia identifies as the inspirational source for becoming an attorney.

"My mom is by far the person I credit for my entire career," she says. "She has opened every door for me. She and my Dad are the people I thank every day for my accomplishments."

The second woman is Tamara Goorevitz, a demanding mentor Chiarizia worked for early in her career who introduced her to transportation law.

"I think she saw my talents as an individual," says Chiarizia of Goorevitz' influence. "She saw the abilities within me and helped me bring them out."

Outside of the legal arena, Chiarizia's older sister Heather Darby has been a major source of inspiration and strength. On bad days, her phone rings. Pep talks are her specialty.

"No matter how old we get I will always look up to her and want her to be proud of me," says Chiarizia. "She is so smart, she could have done whatever she wanted to do in life, but she chose to raise five boys which is the hardest job in the world."

Now General Counsel for Armstrong Transport Group, LLC in Charlotte, N.C., Chiarizia was introduced to the judicial system as a young child through her mother's position at the U.S. District Court



Emily credits the support and inspiration of family for her success. Pictured here at Emily's wedding are her older sister Heather (left) and their parents, Larry and Kathy.



for the District of Maryland. Kathy held numerous jobs in the Federal Court system allowing her to befriend many federal judges, two of whom Chiarizia would later intern with during law school.

"I just loved visiting my mother," says Chiarizia. "On Take Your Daughter to Work Day she would show me active trials happening. I was able to go into judges' chambers and eat lunch with them and talk with them. I grew up with federal judges, going to their picnics at their home and so as a child I just always felt the judges were just one of us. I think that exposure really helped me feel comfortable in the courtroom when I was a litigator."

Chiarizia grew up about six miles outside of Washington, D.C., where both her parents worked. Her father, Larry, worked in the technology department at the American College of Cardiology in Dupont Circle. She and Darby grew up riding the metro system and felt comfortable taking the train to museums and other cultural locations throughout the city.

"Living there was amazing," says Chiarizia. "Being a child in the D.C. area was fantastic."

Her love of the area and her family kept her close for college and law school. She attended the University of Maryland, where she earned a degree in science with a serious eye toward going on to medical school. She reconsidered that career path and found a job with Northrop Grumman, one of the world's largest weapons manufacturers and military technology providers, where she worked in Corporate Wellness for about two years before deciding to enroll at the University of Baltimore School of Law.

After graduation, Chiarizia obtained a clerkship for a judge in Annapolis at the Anne Arundel County District Court, which provided valuable courtroom experience.

"I was able to observe all sorts of court cases and I saw good and bad litigators and was able to talk to the judge about what he liked and didn't like about certain litigation styles," recalls Chiarizia. "It gave me incredible exposure. I probably saw over a thousand cases being litigated in all different industries throughout the various courtrooms."

Following short stints with law firms that didn't prove a good fit,

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Chiarizia joined the insurance defense law firm Franklin & Prokopik in Baltimore, where she came under the wing of Goorevitz, who would most inspire the young lawyer and direct her career toward transportation law.

Chiarizia fondly describes Goorevitz as the law partner everyone feared working for and as an “incredible mentor.” Goorevitz wore multiple hats as a wife, mother, and a leading lawyer in the transportation field, and Chiarizia admired the balance Goorevitz maintained and the control she held over her life. The two remain friends to this day.

“She was a guide who modeled all these characteristics I looked up to,” says Chiarizia. “It was fun to work for her, and it was terrifying at the same time. We called her the notorious TBG.”

Goorevitz excelled as a mentor, expressing interest in Chiarizia’s goals and caring about her personal development.

“She helped me understand what I could bring to the table that might be different from any other associate and helped me understand myself as a professional,” says Chiarizia.

Now as a mentor herself, Chiarizia works to emulate the same attention, care and high expectations Goorevitz modeled.

“I think about her now that I’m a leader to a team,” says Chiarizia. “How do I inspire my teammates and how do I help them feel that their goals are realized?”

Chiarizia embraced litigation over the next several years, defending claims against companies involved in the movement of cargo.

“I’m a good people person,” says Chiarizia. “When you’re in the courtroom or at a deposition, you have opportunities to connect with people on different levels than you would on the street. It’s an art that you learn over time. I think that was part of the fun for me.”

In 2018, Chiarizia made a career move that required leaving Baltimore and the area she had lived in her entire life. She accepted an offer to become Armstrong Transport Group’s first General Counsel, which involved moving to the company’s headquarters in Charlotte, N.C. But Chiarizia had one condition – she didn’t want to be so far from her parents.

“I told my parents I would not take the job unless they would come to Charlotte within the year,” says Chiarizia. Her sister was already living in Mount Pleasant and the goal was for the family to be together.

Larry and Kathy, who had lived in the same house for 35 years, promised to follow their daughter to North Carolina, and now live in Summerville, which is only a three-hour drive from Charlotte.

At the same time that she took the new position, Chiarizia made a second life-changing decision: To get married. In one whirlwind weekend, she and her future husband, Byron, flew to Mexico to tie the knot and returned to Baltimore the next day to drive a packed U-Haul to their new home in Charlotte. Chiarizia started at Armstrong Transport Group that Monday.

“It was awesome,” laughs Chiarizia of the adventure.

She and her husband now have two children: Anna, 2, and Abby, 1. Byron works in IT sourcing and procurement in addition to owning a military apparel company he started with his brother more than 16 years ago.

“Byron is a ray of sunshine,” she says. “He’s always positive, such a good friend and wonderful husband. I couldn’t do this without him. People will say, ‘Emily, I like you, but I love Byron.’”

She remembers calling her parents after her second date with Byron and saying if what she was feeling wasn’t love, she didn’t



Emily and her husband Byron have two daughters, Anna, 2, and Abby, 1.

know what was. “This is definitely him,” she said to her parents. “He is the person you would want me to marry and he’s it.”

It’s been five years since the relocation to Charlotte, but Chiarizia still experiences occasional culture shock. For the first time in her life she owns a home with a driveway. She still marvels at people who drive everywhere as there is very little public transportation. She misses the diversity of the DMV.

“Being from Baltimore and D.C., diversity and celebrating other cultures matters to me a lot,” she says.

At Armstrong Transport Group, which was founded in 2006, Chiarizia acts as a liaison with outside legal counsel for all legal matters. She understands the relationships between freight brokers, carriers, railroad companies, shippers, and the stringent regulations that impact the transportation industry. She also appreciates the unique issues related to intermodal transportation, carrier selection guidelines, cross-border transportation, and increased consumer demand.

In the years since Chiarizia joined Armstrong, the freight brokerage company has undergone tremendous growth, rocketing from around \$200 million in revenue a year to now more than a billion. Chiarizia credits CEO Brian Mann’s leadership as a critical factor in the company’s success. Mann was responsible for bringing Chiarizia on board and tasking her with creating the company’s legal department. She says he is heavily invested in her professional development.

“He’s been a fabulous leader to our company,” she says. “He’s always believed in me. He’s given me every resource available in the

Role models help steer career of transportation law attorney

industry to be successful.”

She also attributes the growth to a private equity recapitalization that took place in 2019 when Carousel Capital invested in Armstrong, allowing the company to acquire technology that makes possible digital freight matching, tracking and tracing of loads, and tracking loads on a mobile device.

“Customers have more transparency about where their freight is and they have more confidence that we’re hiring safe carriers who also have that capability,” says Chiarizia. “It’s been interesting to watch these technological developments unfold.”

In 2021, Armstrong was nominated as Transport Topics’ Top 25 Freight Brokers in the U.S. due to its \$850 million annual revenue and network of more than 65,000 carriers in the U.S., Canada, and Mexico.

Chiarizia manages the carrier, claims, and legal operations departments at Armstrong. In her role, she is responsible for litigation management, internal policy development, compliance, risk management, contract negotiation, general and the resolution of commercial cargo matters for Armstrong’s 150 agency offices.

While Chiarizia still confronts many of the same issues as when she started, the company’s growth burst has brought new issues as well, such as noncompete issues, non-solicitation, breached agreements, and the purchase of smaller brokerage companies.

“My role has changed dramatically,” says Chiarizia, who was initially hired to ensure outside litigation ran smoothly and to review contracts and standard operating forms. “It now includes doing mergers and acquisitions, commercial law, transactional matters, all things I had never done up until we were recapitalized.”

Primerus has proved remarkably helpful as a resource Chiarizia can rely on as Armstrong Transport Group continues its growth and encounters new legal challenges.

“I’ve been able to find law firms through Primerus who can help me with things I don’t know how to do or in jurisdictions where I don’t know anybody,” she says. “Having a network of attorneys that I can reach out to in an emergency situation is very helpful. I also love that I know that these attorneys have good reputations in the legal field.”

She appreciates meeting attorneys at Primerus events and developing personal relationships with them because an attorney’s personality is an important consideration in whether she chooses to work with them. She sat on a panel at the recent PDI Convocation in Colorado Springs where she discussed what inside counsel is looking for when hiring outside counsel.

While every decision is case specific, Chiarizia says she typically wants a medium-size firm and an attorney with transportation experience who is going to recommend the most expedient course.

“I appreciate attorneys who understand the business side of these decisions for me and understand that I have to explain the choices I’m making to my CEO,” says Chiarizia.

She tries to hire female attorneys whenever possible because she sees it as a responsibility to afford women opportunities in male-dominated industries such as law and transportation.

“I think even if I’m hiring a male partner at a law firm what I really want to see is are they including a female associate, is that associate being properly mentored, and, if my relationship ends up being with that associate, are they getting credit for my business,” she says.

She appreciates Primerus attorneys who send out newsletters or e-mail blasts updating her on new regulations, which change often and can be time-consuming to keep up with on a regular basis.

“Transportation is a highly regulated industry and those regulations are changing every year, if not biannually,” she says. “We’re reading those things, we’re reading the journals and articles they post, and we really appreciate the practical insights they provide.”



Emily Chiarizia is scuba certified and has dived to an underwater vineyard in Croatia called Edivo Vina at the bottom of the Adriatic Sea in the Bay of Mali Ston.

In her leisure time, which isn’t much at the moment, Chiarizia enjoys woodworking, scuba diving, traveling, and gardening.

“I spend a lot of time cultivating my friendships,” she says. “My friends are very, very important to me and I feel like we’re all at different stages of life and being a supportive friend takes a lot of work and I’m proud to call that a hobby of mine.”

She is currently remodeling a first-floor room for her parents to stay in when they visit and has plans to take them to Spain in the fall.

“I live for my parents,” she says. “They have given me every gift — empathy and kindness. I just really appreciate and value everything they’ve done. Everything I do I try to give them something in return.”