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# Calm in the Courtroom

## Trial lawyer Bill Hanglely wins cases with conversation and charm

BY NICK DIULIO  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY LUIGI CIUFFETELLI

SEVEN YEARS AGO, BILL HANGLELY experienced one of the most incredible moments in his five-decade career as one of Pennsylvania's most celebrated trial lawyers. That moment saved the life of a mentally disabled man.

In 1987, a jury convicted Karl Chambers for fatally beating an elderly woman named Anna Mae Morris with a large stick in order to steal her Social Security check. Chambers was sentenced to death, lost his appeal, and awaited his execution for nearly two decades.

Then Hanglely got involved.

Thanks to his reputation for winning cases about everything from First Amendment rights to intellectual property, antitrust, attorney malpractice and general business matters, Hanglely was contacted in 2005 by the American Bar Association Death Penalty Representation Project, which asked him to secure a new sentencing hearing for Chambers. Hanglely was to argue before a York County judge that the convicted man could not be executed because of his intellectual disability.

Hanglely's case centered on the 2002 U.S. Supreme Court ruling in *Atkins v. Virginia*, which states that executing "the mentally retarded" is against the Eighth Amendment's ban on "cruel and unusual punishment."

Up to that point, it had been tacitly understood that Chambers was disabled, says Hanglely, founder and chairman of Hanglely Aronchick Segal Pudlin & Schiller in Philadelphia. "But the minute the Supreme Court ruled on the *Atkins* case, suddenly the York district attorney decided he wasn't retarded after all," he says, using the terminology employed in the case.

To make its case, the state brought in an expert witness, a psychiatrist who testified that he had studied standardized test data and Chambers' mental-health records, concluding that the man—who scored an IQ of 60 as a middle-school student and 74 as an adult inmate—was not disabled but rather severely below average intelligence.

Hanglely knew the expert witness to be "an honorable man and a scholar." And

### WILLIAM T. HANGLELY

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“To get an expert witness to change his opinion on the stand is almost unheard of,” Hanglely says. “I don’t expect that to ever happen again in my lifetime.”

so the longtime trial lawyer did what he does best. He began methodically cross-examining the psychiatrist, employing a conversational courtroom tactic that has served him well over the years.

“Some lawyers are confrontational. They want to make a witness feel like dirt and then he’s putty in their hands. That’s not my approach,” says Hanglely. “I think a lot of witness examination should be freestyle, where the witness is invested in the conversation. Then, how you ask your questions, the pace you set, and the energy you build into the conversation is, if you’re fortunate, going to lead to the truth.”

Marc J. Sonnenfeld has witnessed Hanglely’s nuanced courtroom presence on many occasions. The two lawyers, now close friends, have known each other since they worked together during the inception of Hanglely’s firm.

“He’s a terrific lawyer and he’s got a very nice presence about him. He walks into a courtroom and that presence is felt immediately,” says Sonnenfeld, now a partner at Morgan Lewis in Philadelphia. “And he’s very good on his feet. He exudes great confidence and he’s also very charming, which is something that definitely serves him well in front of juries and judges.”

It served him well inside that York County courthouse in 2005. With the aid of his own psychological expert, information from the American Psychological and American Psychiatric associations, and studies that demonstrated the fallibility of standardized tests in determining disabilities, Hanglely patiently walked the county’s witness through a conversation that ended in a startling admission.

“He said, ‘Mr. Hanglely, you’re right,’” Hanglely says. “‘He’s retarded. I shouldn’t have said he wasn’t.’”

Recalling the moment, Hanglely leans back in his chair and looks through the 27th story window of his firm’s conference room. “I don’t expect that to ever happen again in my lifetime,” he says. “It was probably the one piece of lawyering I’m proudest of. To get an expert witness to change his opinion on the stand is almost unheard of. And considering that a man’s

life was in the balance and that we saved his life that day ... I still get shivers when I think about that moment.”

#### GROWING UP AS THE YOUNGEST OF 10

children in Long Beach, N.Y., Hanglely was surrounded mostly by middle-class, blue-collar Americans. Cops. Firemen. Teachers. His own father was a beer salesman.

“It was a wonderful childhood,” he says. “It just wasn’t the kind of society that produced lawyers.”

After high school, Hanglely studied music, majoring in vocals, at SUNY Fredonia. A talented vocalist who could play several instruments, he taught vocal music at an elementary school on Long Island for a year and met his wife Mary during that time. But music, he says, “never felt like a vocation—not in the sense of a priest having a vocation.”

It didn’t take long for him to find his true calling. During Hanglely’s senior year at Fredonia, the dean of students said he’d observed Hanglely’s work as student body president and asked him if he had ever considered going to law school. The dean told him about a new test called the LSAT and suggested Hanglely take it, for curiosity’s sake.

“And I looked at him like he was a nut,” Hanglely recalls with a laugh.

Nonetheless, the 20-year-old Hanglely decided to give it a shot. Just before graduating, he paid the \$10 examination fee, studied the prep materials, took the LSAT, and ended up in the 99th percentile.

Suddenly scholarship offers were coming in from respected colleges and universities all over the country. Hanglely knew he could go anywhere he wanted, and after his yearlong stint teaching music, he decided to enroll at the University of Pennsylvania Law School.

“It was absolutely fascinating to me. An opening of new worlds and thoughts. My head was just exploding with it all,” he says. “By the end of my first year I knew that I wanted to be a trial lawyer.”

Forty-five years later, Hanglely is still excited about his work, which has earned him a national reputation as one of the country’s best litigators. In addition to his trial work, he has also served as a judge pro tem in the Philadelphia Court

of Common Pleas and, by appointment of U.S. Supreme Court Chief Justice John Roberts, is one of the two lawyers in private practice who serve on the U.S. Judicial Conference Advisory Committee on Evidence Rules.

"I can't think of anything else I could have done with my life that I would have enjoyed as much as what I'm doing now," he says. "I really hit the big one."

#### FOR TWO AND A HALF YEARS AFTER

graduating from Penn in 1966, Hanglely worked for Schnader Harrison Segal & Lewis in Philadelphia. There, alongside legendary lawyers like Bernie Siegel and Pennsylvania Attorney General William Schnader, he was given the opportunity to try all sorts of cases, laying the groundwork for his eventual reputation as a jack-of-all-trades litigator.

Then, one night in 1968, lawyers Stephen M. Goodman and Neil Epstein visited Hanglely at his home. The young, ambitious attorneys said they were interested in starting their own firm. They had already discussed it with a handful of their peers who said they'd be interested in making a go of it. They wanted to know if Hanglely, who was 28 at the time, would join them.

"We were young, optimistic, and I thought this was my chance to strike out on my own and build something from the ground up," says Hanglely. "It all worked out great in the end, but that doesn't mean it wasn't a really stupid idea."

Those early years were challenging but rewarding. "I was thrilled that Bill decided to join us," recalls Goodman, now a partner at Morgan Lewis. "Not only was he a fine lawyer, but he was a real people person. You might say he had a wonderful performance style, which I attribute to his having been a musician. Musicians are used to satisfying an audience, and I think that is a core ingredient in Bill's personality and his success as a lawyer."

Hanglely's firm still embodies the youthful energy and optimism of those early years.

"This is a teaching institution. Young lawyers come here to learn how to lawyer. And people seek us out, seek me out,

because we can try cases. There just aren't many firms out there who do that these days," says Hanglely.

In a world of niche specialties, Hanglely has built his reputation on being a superb generalist. You name it and he's probably tried it: cases concerning fertility medications, antitrust laws, securities litigation and intellectual property.

"The ones I enjoy the most are when I get to represent the little guy," he says.

In 2008, Hanglely had an opportunity to do that for a Bucks County real estate broker named Caswell Holloway. A large national development firm had refused to abide by an agreement to purchase \$5 million worth of land it acquired from Holloway and his partner. Without that payment, Holloway feared the company would have to fold.

After more than 11 months of litigation negotiations, Hanglely and partner John Stapleton were able to secure an estimated \$4.9 million settlement three weeks before trial.

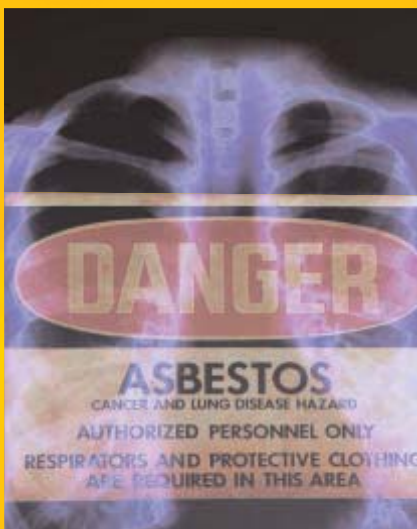
"The amount of preparation that he and Stapleton put into getting ready for the depositions and a possible trial was nothing short of amazing," says Holloway. "He came to know our job and our business as well—if not better—than we did. No piece of evidence was overlooked, no aspect of the case that he didn't consider thoroughly. It was truly remarkable."

Later that year, Hanglely received a handwritten letter from Holloway on Thanksgiving. In it, Holloway said that one of the things he was most thankful for was the pleasure of being represented by Bill Hanglely and John Stapleton.

"And that, to me, is the closest thing to religion I'll ever have," says Hanglely. "Knowing this is my job, and that if I can do it right I can make a difference. If I didn't care about it so much I'd have no business doing it. I really lucked out on the job I got." [SL](#)



HANGLELY ON HIS  
CROSS-EXAMINATION STYLE  
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