



Conversation

Litigation

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Reporter Lisa Willis on 4 Years, 700 Stories and the Legal Community That Changed Her

As I leave Law.com and the Daily Business Review, I look back on the South Florida legal beat, the lawyers and judges who trusted me with their stories, as well as a profession transformed by COVID-19, remote work and AI.

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By



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LAW.COM Senior Litigation Reporter Lisa Willis.
Courtesy photo

When I arrived at Law.com and the Daily Business Review near the end of the COVID-19 era, I knew litigation, journalism and deadlines. I knew how to ask questions, listen carefully and find the human story beneath a court filing, verdict or judicial ruling.

What I did not know was how much the South Florida legal community would change me.

Today, on my last day with the DBR, the regional publication of Law.com—now part of Centellic, following the combination of ALM and Legal Business Research into one global company—I leave with more than 700 stories published, a full notebook, a grateful heart and a deeper understanding of the lawyers, judges and advocates who make up one of the most colorful legal markets in the country.

I began this chapter as the world was still emerging from isolation. The Miami office closed. Legal journalism, like the practice of law, became more remote, more digital and more dependent on Zoom calls, virtual hearings and calendar links. The old courthouse rhythms had not disappeared, but they had been forced to make room for something faster, leaner and more efficient.

That shift became personal for me in ways few people knew.

During my time at the Daily Business Review, I became a widow. My husband of 17 years died after suffering from dementia. Being able to continue writing remotely while caring for him through the end was a godsend. Work gave me purpose, structure and connection during a time when my private life was being reshaped by grief and caregiving.

And the work never stopped challenging me.

I covered settlements, jury verdicts, judicial rulings, legal fights and professional turning points. But the stories that stayed with me most were often the profiles: the long conversations with attorneys and judges about their lives, losses, ambitions, regrets and hard-earned wisdom. I also had the sad honor of writing obituaries for members of the legal community I had come to know.

Those pieces were never just assignments. They were odes to careers, families, colleagues and a profession that remembers its own.

I also watched the practice of law change in real time. Remote work altered the

courtroom. Generational divides widened over technology and tradition. Then artificial intelligence arrived, moving from curiosity to controversy almost overnight. When I started, I barely knew what ChatGPT was. Before long, AI had become one of the most urgent conversations in law.

I was an early proponent of learning it, not fearing it, encouraged by respected Miami attorneys including the legendary Roy Black and omnipresent Francisco “Frank” Ramos, who understood that technology would not replace judgment, preparation or voice—but could change how lawyers and journalists work.

South Florida law is not quiet. It is personality-driven, ambitious, sometimes theatrical and often deeply consequential. The attorneys here know how to fight, but many also know how to tell a story. They understood that legal journalism is not stenography. It is context, credibility and knowing when a ruling, quote or career arc signals something larger.

Nationally, the legal profession has been changing just as quickly. A regional story can become a national one overnight. A lawyer once known mainly in Miami can suddenly become part of a larger political, cultural or constitutional conversation.

That challenged me intellectually more than any job I have ever had. It also made these the most fun four years of my journalism career.

I leave proud of the work, but more than that, grateful for the trust. Lawyers called. Judges opened up. Readers followed my byline. Editors pushed me. The beat gave me a front-row seat to a profession in transition—and, unexpectedly, a second wind in my own life.

I arrived as an experienced journalist. I leave as one who is still learning, still adapting and still surprised by how much a story can matter when it is written with care.

Forrest Gump was right: “Life is like a box of chocolates—you never know what you’re gonna get.”

I never expected this chapter to hold so much loss, purpose, friendship and grace, but

I will carry its lessons, its people and its purpose with me always.

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