

HOT LIST

PRO BONO

A SPECIAL REPORT

Midsize firm steps up for Holocaust survivor

In 1939, Joanna Boisen's client was one of 160,000 Jews in Poland's Łódź ghetto. For more than four years, he worked as a janitor in the Nazi-guarded center, where 43,500 people died from disease, starvation and murder. His duties included collecting decaying corpses and taking them to a dump.

For years, her client, now 92 and living in a low-income assisted-living center in Auburn, Wash., sought reparations as a Holocaust survivor. But frustrated by red tape, dimming memories of witnesses and technical glitches, he gave up trying.

Boisen, a full-time pro bono partner at Seattle-based Foster Pepper, decided to take up his cause five years ago. She worked with German authorities, answering their questions about dates, providing documentation and, as time went by, pressuring them ever harder. "My letters got more and more aggressive," she said.

Her client requested anonymity for this article—he fears he will lose the reparations she obtained for him if his identity is revealed, Boisen said.

Boisen's job as a full-time pro bono lawyer is unusual at a firm the size of Foster Pepper, with about 120 lawyers. The firm brought her aboard five years ago, partly because the Washington State Bar Association was leaning on attorneys to provide 30 hours of pro bono service annually, said Robert Kunold Jr., the

firm's chief executive officer. "We felt like with Joanna, we could at least collectively meet some of that goal," he said, adding that Boisen often backs up other attorneys on pro bono matters.

One of the problems for Boisen's client was determining which of two funds his reparations should come from. One fund pays survivors who received wages for their work in the ghettos; another pays those who did not. Her client was in the second group, but because he received rations of food and water for his work, his petitions for reparations repeatedly got bogged down.

"They are meticulous," she said of the German officials who decide on reparations payments. If a date entered on a form is off by as little as one day, the paperwork can get kicked back, she said.

In July, she got a letter from the German social security program saying that her client would receive \$28,000 in back payments and \$800 each month for the rest of his life. It was a "huge award," compared with those most frequently given by the office, she said.



JOANNA BOISEN

"When I called my client, he cried and said that he now could finally spoil his grandchildren," Boisen said. She added that those grandchildren are now in their 50s.

—LEIGH JONES