

# SANDY LOEB

## Quietly Helping 'the Little Guy' When Work Injuries Happen

by Theresa Churchill

CHAMPAIGN — People who know Sandra K. Loeb runs marathons won't be surprised to learn she likes trail running. After all, the alternative offers not only the challenges of uneven footing and less room for passing but also the opportunity to get faster with a lower risk of injury.

As the go-to workers' compensation attorney and partner at Spiros Law, P.C., Loeb stays with clients for the long haul and pursues every option while compiling an impressive track record of results.

"You can have a small case worth \$1,000 to \$5,000, but it's a big case to the average individual who's been injured on the job, something that person would never be able to realize without you," she says. "This is why I became a lawyer."

Loeb covers a lot of ground, serving clients all over Illinois south of Interstate 80 out of her firm's offices in Champaign, Kankakee, and Danville or from her trusty SUV, a 2015 Lexus RX350 in dark brown. And she does it without fanfare, discussing her victories only when pressed and going out of her way to point out her husband is the more accomplished runner.

"I'm not good talking about myself," Loeb admits. "I'm very Swedish about such things."

### ONE FOOT IN FRONT OF THE OTHER

Born in Cleveland 46 years ago to Morris and Florence Loeb, Sandy lived a few years in Michigan before the family settled in Glencoe when she was 9. That's also the time she started jogging with her dad, an insurance executive. "He was one of those people caught up in the running craze in the late '70s, early '80s," she recalls. "To spend some time with him when he wasn't traveling, I decided to go running with him when I could."

Her mother was a registered nurse, but Loeb began dreaming of a career in publishing while a student at New Trier Township High School in Winnetka. But her criminal justice teacher suggested a different path. She told the teen that her mind "worked like a lawyer's," and because it truly did, Loeb did not forget it.

She remembered the advice even while earning a bachelor's in English from the



University of Illinois, Champaign-Urbana, and then while heading to the East Coast to chase her dream. "I realized quickly that's a very, very, very competitive industry, and you start at the bottom," she says. "I could not afford to live in New York City as a copy editor.

"I'd thought my talents were more creative, but then I realized the law could be creative, too."

Loeb moved back to Chicago, got a job at Starbucks for the health insurance, and briefly worked for a couple of law firms, the former Barsey Joseph & Lichtenstein and McDermott Will & Emery.

"The people I worked around were smart, they didn't seem to worry too much about corporate culture, they could help people in need, and they seemed like they had a good time doing it," she says. "I decided it was an excellent field to pursue."

Loeb returned to Champaign, becoming a "double Illini" when she earned her law degree in 1999. She has not left since.

Her first job was at the personal injury firm where she clerked during law school—Frederick & Hagle, then known as Johnson, Frank, Frederick & Walsh—and that's when she honed in on workers' compensation as the focus of her practice. Loeb moved over to

Spiros in 2008.

Loeb estimates that 80 percent of her caseload is workers' compensation and 20 percent is personal injury.

James D. Spiros, the firm's founding partner, says he can't say enough about Loeb's talents, in part, because she says so little.

"She'd much rather talk about what she can do for a client because that's just Sandy," he says. "She doesn't seek or want attention. What she does want is to produce excellent results, and she keeps putting one foot in front of the other until she does it."

Patricia Gifford, a senior associate, adds that Loeb is a great resource for the firm's seven associates and a role model who leads by example.

"Sometimes we see shameless self-promotion in our profession, but there's a quiet humility about Sandy," Gifford says. "She is also a very good friend and is always there for you when you need to talk."

### SMALL CASES, BIG REWARDS

A key case early in Loeb's career involved an insurance company that offered \$1,200 to compensate her client for injuries she suffered when her car was rear-ended. The Champaign woman had no health insurance, Loeb says,

and her emergency room bills surpassed \$3,000. “We could not accept the settlement, and I actually tried the case before a jury,” she says. “We wound up getting a verdict in excess of the medical bills, so the lawyer could get paid, the medical bills could get paid, and the client could bring home some money.”

“A lot of attorneys would look at that as a very small case, but I found it very satisfying to be able to do that for someone.”

Loeb had to be even more tenacious in her representation of Mary Jeanne Nash and, after the Mattoon woman’s death, her estate.

Nash worked at an auto dealership and was a 25-year employee who slipped and fell in the parking lot on Jan. 30, 2008. She broke her right leg, underwent successful surgery but failed to recover fully because of a preexisting myopathy, or muscle weakness syndrome. She died on Aug. 19, 2010, at age 61 of causes unrelated to her work injuries.

Denied by an arbitrator, the Workers’ Compensation Commission and the Circuit Court of Coles County, Loeb in 2015 won a permanent disability benefit for Nash’s estate from the Fourth District Appellate Court, a decision confirmed by the Illinois Supreme Court.

“I thought the interpretation of the law was incorrect, so I kept going after each court denied me,” Loeb says. “It was a lot of work to do for an \$8,000 to \$10,000 judgment, but the law is more clear now when somebody dies without dependents in the midst of a workers’ compensation case.”

It’s also one of the cases of which she’s most proud. “I’ve always looked at things from the perspective of the little guy,” she says.

She adds that her parents were not born with “silver spoons in their mouths.” She saw them struggle with money, work hard, and delay retirement until their 80s. “Maybe that’s a driving force for me to help other people who have those kinds of struggles.”

Her dad is 88, her mom is 86. Loeb regularly visits them in their Northbrook home, especially since her only brother, Michael, died of natural causes at age 34, the year after she graduated from law school. Loeb also has two older half-sisters, Barbara and Teri Loeb, both of whom live in the Chicago area.

#### DEALING WITH EMOTIONS, CONSTRAINTS

Loeb’s clients often experience a myriad of emotions, starting with feeling disloyal about filing a claim because of a negative connotation that people who do so are gaming the system. “That’s crazy to me because that’s not what I’m seeing,” she says. “We have this law to make sure that a person who has given so much to

a company, including part of their body, gets compensated for that.”

She believes, however, that the Illinois Workers’ Compensation Commission has grown more friendly to employers as the economic and political climates have changed over the years. “The law is actually designed to be construed in favor of the employee when it’s a close call, but the close-call case is tougher for the employee than when I first started,” she says.

More often than not, Loeb’s clients are able to return to work. Still, disagreements must be resolved about reasonable and necessary medical care, whether or not a person requires time off or work restrictions, and indeed if the injury is even compensable under the law.

“I try to convince people not to take the employer’s reaction to their claim too personally. It’s not necessarily the employer who is driving the case. It’s the insurance company, and it’s a business decision,” Loeb says.

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“Unfortunately, employment relationships are very personal, and workers’ compensation cases are stressful. I try to get people to let me deal with their claim while they focus on restoring their health.”

Insurance defense attorney Ken Reifsteck of Champaign says when claimants come to him, he refers them to Loeb without thinking twice about it. “I’ve never had a complaint back from somebody I’ve sent to her,” he says. “She’s professional, reasonable and moves things along.”

The bio on her firm’s web site indicates Loeb has successfully tried cases before juries in both Champaign and Vermilion counties and has obtained millions of dollars in settlements for others in Coles, Iroquois, Kankakee, Macon and McLean counties.

She has been a Leading Lawyer since 2012 and serves on the Section Council of workers’ compensation for the Illinois State Bar Association. She is a former president of the East Central Illinois Women Attorneys Association. The group develops the

participation, interaction and promotion of women in the practice of law, the judiciary and public service through retreats, meetings and special events.

“Women typically have skills that are well-suited for the law, primarily listening, multi-tasking, and academic skills,” Loeb says. “I think it is difficult for a lot of women to have families and practice, but the women who do it usually do both well.”

#### PREFERS TO KEEP MOVING

Loeb celebrates 11 years of marriage this year to her husband Chris Delis, a computer programmer for the University of Illinois. They are members of the Second Wind Running Club and the Kennekuk Road Runners, and the regularly enjoy bicycling with their friends.

They’re coming off a particularly hectic summer where they helped move his daughter, Allyssa Delis-Sollars, 20, to Indiana State University, Terra Haute, and themselves to a house with a swimming pool on Champaign’s West Side.

John Sturmanis, another insurance defense lawyer in Champaign, says he’s never seen her frazzled in the 20 years he’s known her. “She stays pretty calm and collected,” he says. “I like having cases with her because she’s so down-to-earth and grounded, and we can usually resolve our disputes.”

Loeb’s jewelry is understated save for a rugged black watch with an oversized face. Her dark blazer, shift dress and pumps neither flaunt nor conceal her trim figure.

“I like biking out into the cornfields around here with some friends, male and female, 25 to 65,” she says. “It’s also fairly typical for Chris and me to take a trip together for a long weekend in the summer, to ride our road bikes somewhere else or go run a race.”

She’s also enjoying the change of scenery running eight to 20 miles a week in her new neighborhood, getting in some trail running when she can. “I usually have to drive 45 minutes to get a nice trail with some elevation,” she says. “I like hills and woods.”

Loeb has completed five marathons and 15 half-marathons. Her last marathon required her to run from Big Sur to Carmel along California’s Pacific Coast Highway. The most challenging was the Maui Marathon in Hawaii because of temperatures in the 80s.

“There are many reasons why I run, but it’s mostly about how it makes me feel afterward,” Loeb says.

“I have a job that often requires dealing with difficult people under stressful circumstances. On the mornings when I get a run in before going to work, I feel so much calmer and can remain more focused.” ■