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## PROFILE IN PROFESSIONALISM

### Roger L. Zissu, Esquire

#### 2013 Professionalism Award for the Second Circuit

By Jennifer J. Salopek

**R**oger L. Zissu, Esquire, received the prestigious 2013 American Inns of Court Professionalism Award for the Second Circuit, which was presented in September by the Honorable Robert A. Katzman and Stephen F. Molo, Esq.

Zissu has been practicing law for 50 years. Currently a name partner in the firm of Fross Zelnick Lehrman & Zissu in New York, New York, he has built a distinguished career in the fields of copyright law and trademark. Zissu's copyright work includes litigation and counseling on a broad spectrum of copyright authorship, ownership and infringement issues in a wide variety of media involving all kinds of works.

Born and raised on Long Island, Zissu followed in his father's footsteps when he chose to specialize in copyright law. His father, Leonard, was a respected specialist who counted the family of Dashiell Hammett among his clients. But for Roger, there were detours along the way to a similarly esteemed career. A summa cum laude graduate in French literature from Dartmouth College, Zissu spent his junior year in France studying at the Sorbonne and Institut d'Etudes Politiques and had originally planned to teach.

"The 'publish or perish' mentality gave me the sense that there was a lot of politics and bureaucracy in academic life," he says. "Although my dad really didn't push me to enter law, I saw from his experience that law was about individual relationships with people and [allowed] a certain level of independence."

Zissu earned his J. D. cum laude from Harvard Law School. Immediately after graduation, he served as law clerk to Judge John F. Dooling, Jr., of the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of New York. Zissu was partner in the firm of Cowan, Liebowitz & Latman before joining FrossZelnick in 1990.

His colleagues cite him as a model of professionalism. "Roger's handling of [a client who did not want to comply with discovery rules] taught me not only that lawyers must stand fast against ethical erosions, but also that clients may need and want advocates who combat the clients' baser inclinations," wrote Jane C. Ginsburg in her nomination of Zissu for the award.

Zissu is no Pollyanna. "My professional philosophy is based on the advantages and utility of the adversary system to get to the truth. Lawyers should be zealous, but shouldn't clutter the process with interpersonal antics and differences. The goal is to get to justice, he says.

During his career, Zissu has touched many lives and mentored many young lawyers. "Roger cannot help but teach as he does, and because he loves what he does, his teaching is inspired. The law firm; the courtroom—they are all his classroom," wrote Lillian Laserson.

In his acceptance remarks at the award ceremony in September, Zissu said, "I never really thought about being a teacher in my practice, although I confess to having volunteered a lot of advice and...told more than my share of war stories."

As a specialist in character rights, Zissu's war stories are more colorful than most, featuring such diverse characters as Superman, Tarzan, Troll dolls, Winnie the Pooh, and the Muppets. A 1998 profile in *New York Super Lawyers* emphasized his thorough and methodical research, delving into the interests and habits of adversaries, fellow counsel, and judges alike. This was exemplified with an apocryphal story about a judge who was a New York Giants fan and a strategically displayed Troll doll who just happened to be wearing a Giants jersey.

Zissu reflects on his chosen field: "I represent artists, professors—many people who can't afford as much; but I want to be on both sides of issues. It's a really interactive practice, and it's a mix. The people I deal with every day are interesting and very colorful. But I don't care for the self-important term, 'intellectual property lawyer.' Doing that kind of work does not mean one is an intellectual," he says.

Zissu has been named to the Best Lawyers in America, and *Who's Who in American Law*. He has lectured on mass media and copyright law at the Benjamin Cardozo School of Law and New York University School of Law.

Like his father before him, Zissu served as president of the Copyright Society of the U.S.A. and is now an honorary trustee. He served as chairman of the Committee on Copyright and Literary Property of the New York City Bar from 1989 to 1992.

As for the state of professionalism and civility today, Zissu takes a typically pragmatic approach.

"The most important thing in litigation is credibility, so that the judge will listen to you. You cannot abuse the point at which the judge looks to you for truth. Professionalism won't help you win a losing case, but it allows you to be heard." ♦

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