Tax Clinic Feature on UW 360
Innocent Spouse Relief

October 2012

Stacy:

You know we had this whirlwind romance in the beginning, right? We had a Cinderella, Prince Charming wedding.

Speaker:

I pronounce you husband and wife

Narrator:

Stacy’s marriage had a story book beginning but the promise to love and to cherish didn’t last long.

Stacy:

A lot of just putting me down making me feel like I was worthless, which I did. It gradually got worse and worse over the years. He had me under complete control and I would do whatever he said because I didn’t want to get hurt. I didn’t want my kids to get hurt.

Narrator:

After fleeing to a shelter and finally getting a divorce, this chapter of Stacy’s life was supposed to be over. But years later, there was one thing she never could have seen coming. While married, Stacy’s ex-husband failed to pay their federal taxes and the IRS was coming to collect which included pursuing both spouses.

Stacy:

It was like $25,000 which to me is a huge amount of money.

Speaker 3:

Tax Clinic, this is Eric speaking.

Narrator:

She called the Federal Tax Clinic at the University Of Washington School Of Law.

Scott Schumacher:

Students are able to actually practice law while still in law school. It’s sort of like residency for doctors or your internship where these are real clients, they are real issues.

Narrator:

The clinic represents five to six hundred clients a year in all types of tax cases.
Scott Schumacher:

In the first six months of this year, we saved tax payers over 1.2 million dollars.

Narrator:

Adria Vondra is a practicing tax lawyer who started at the UW School of Law clinic. As a student she took the original call from Stacy.

Adria Vondra:

She told me her whole story just in the first call. She was very open and honest and really forthcoming and everything that had happened to her.

Narrator:

Like Stacy, 90% of clients seeking innocent spouse relief are women, often single mothers with fairly low incomes.

Adria Vondra:

She associated the IRS with her ex-husband and all that she’d been through.

Narrator:

Working hand in hand with the Federal Tax Clinic, it was Stacy versus the IRS, a battle that would drag on for years.

Scott Schumacher:

For the most part, the IRS really tries to get the answer right and they try to only hold those that are truly responsible, responsible.

Narrator:

Because of cases like Stacy’s, the IRS decided to drop its two year statute of limitations in some innocent spouse cases.

Scott Schumacher:

And the IRS by its own doing has relaxed the rules and made it much easier for people, women to get innocent spouse relief.

Narrator:

After years of court hearings and appeals, the IRS made a final ruling on Stacy’s case.

Adria Vondra:

I texted her and I said this is Adria call me right away. And so she called me about two minutes later and I told her and I also told her she was getting a refund of over $20,000 and she pretty much screamed in the air and was very, very excited.

Stacy:

I couldn’t believe it that somebody like me actually won, you know, won this huge. It was a huge ordeal for years and years.

Narrator:

Nearly every day at the UW School of Law Federal Tax Clinic another Stacy is on the line.

Scott Schumacher:

When you can help someone who has a problem that’s just insurmountable to them, where you have grown men afterwards cry and I get e-mails afterward saying, “you’ve allowed me to move forward with my life.”

Speaker 3:

What’s for dinner?

Narrator:

It was supposed to be a story book beginning. That was far from true. But at least for Stacy today, she is finally ready to begin the next chapter of her life.

Stacy:

Because it was such a long fight, I never thought I would have this resolution. And it’s just amazing. So all those people who think that it can’t be done, it can be done. And there is a happy ending sometimes and not to give up.