

Shannon M. Miller:

Talking about death and dying and getting their family members to talk about death and dying, it is such an important part of life. And, it can be incredibly beautiful.

I was a public defender in Marion County. That's where I grew to love litigation and being in the courtroom. I feel like Gainesville is a great place to become an attorney, to grow up as an attorney, to be mentored, and then to share that mentoring experience with other young lawyers. I got into elder law and the community of elder law attorneys, and decided to become board certified in elder law. And, the reason that I decided to become board certified is because I found that all the board certified attorneys really understood all of it, when it came to estate planning, when it came to Medicaid planning, when it came to probate. And, I wanted that level of expertise. And I feel confident now, because I stay within that group of board certified attorneys that I continue to learn from my colleagues and grow. I've never really had a lot of difficulty talking about death and dying issues.

I don't know why, but I'm pretty comfortable talking about making sure that people have a good death. My grandfather, who I was very close to, had a terrible death experience when I was in law school. He had Alzheimer's and suffered tremendously from that disease. He was a brilliant man. It was really hard to watch him go through that process. He actually ended up needing long-term care, it was not what he would have wanted. So, that was compelling to me. My own mother died of pancreatic cancer in 2004, and that was really hard as well. But all of those things, I think have shaped me in trying to help people have the best possible way of planning for incapacity, which is horribly difficult on families and the loved one themselves. And, really trying to help people understand what dementia is. Like for example, people want their loved one to know the truth.

Like, the truth is that, you keep saying mom that you want to go home, but we sold your home 10 years ago. I can do that kind of education where I can say like, "It's okay, if she thinks she still has her home." People don't know that, that's okay. And, that's actually helpful in dealing with a loved one who has dementia, is to go with the lie. It's so much more comforting to them and it puts them at ease. They don't get so stressed or anxious. So, it's just little things like that, that I've learned along the way in dealing with these issues in my own family, that have really crafted my love of seniors, my love of their families trying to go through the most difficult thing that you can imagine. I love talking about ways to better protect seniors, and to make sure that they have their independence, and that their rights are being, and that they end their lives with a good death. It doesn't have to be terrible. And, that ultimately is something that I can do in my life to really help people through those processes.