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Profile: Pavel Krepiy

Moscow native maintains focus on a singular mission: Helping those harmed by the actions of others

By **STEPHEN ELLISON**

Doing right by others has been a lifelong endeavor for Pavel Krepiy. From the time he was a teenager in Moscow, working as a news anchor for a program focused on children's rights, to current day, representing people who have been harmed by the actions or inactions of others, Krepiy has been the consummate advocate.

A partner with the Anna Dubrovsky Law Group in San Francisco, Krepiy is a seasoned personal-injury lawyer of more than 10 years, specializing in wrongful death and catastrophic injury cases. He takes pride in the small firm's ability to provide personal attention to each client and every case, with a focus on just one area of law.

"We don't do any other types of cases," he said. "Personal injury is all we do. I honestly feel that there's so many nuances within the personal injury arena, from the pre-litigation handling of the cases through litigation and lien negotiations. My personal view is that you should focus on something that you know really well instead of trying to handle many different areas."

That personal injury arena indeed consists of a variety of case types with a wide range of damages, whether it's a \$10,000 slip and fall or an eight-figure catastrophic injury. Each one is just as important as the next, requiring steadfast preparation, Krepiy said, and the Dubrovsky firm typically deploys a "hybrid" type of focus group to help them get ready to go to trial.

One part of the focus group is reaching out to services that offer them and for which Krepiy plays the role of defense attorney while firm principal Anna Dubrovsky is the plaintiffs' attorney, a strategy he said provides a set of checks and balances. Next, the pair runs



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different track patterns and liability issues with some friends or colleagues who would be playing the role of jurors to gain yet another perspective.

"While working on the case, we get so focused, we get married to the case and the facts of the case, and we feel that we really have a strong case," Krepiy explained. "But sometimes it is very helpful to hear from somebody who has no stake in the case, who is not an attorney. Just really to get a fresh look at some things that may be overlooked initially."

The most difficult aspect of trials for Krepiy is the hurry-up-and-wait game that sometimes comes into play. Often-times when they have a set trial date, he and Dubrovsky will spend long days trying to get everything ready for that target date – conducting expert depositions, writing trial briefs and getting their motions in limine – and then something unexpected causes a delay. Not only is it difficult for the attorneys, but it's likely even more so for their client, he said, especially if the lag time ends up being several months or even a year.

"If we get to that point, that means that we've tried to resolve the case and

we were unable to ... because we want to make sure that our clients are compensated fully for the harm that was caused to them," Krepiy explained. "But to tell the client that they need to wait another six months for their day in court, I think on a personal level is very difficult.

"Trial is difficult in general," he continued. "There's always a risk. You're left to the jury's perception of your client, of your witnesses, of your experts. We just really try to do our best, but at the end of the day, it is very subjective as to how the jury feels, how they feel about the damages that are being claimed by our clients."

From Russia with... a dream

Born and raised in Moscow, Krepiy was exposed at an early age to domestic and social issues that likely steered him toward studying law. When he was about 16 years old, his mother was going through a divorce with his stepfather, and while he really wasn't involved directly in the dispute, he witnessed some of the divisive conflict couples experience when dissolving a marriage.

"There were some legal issues that were going on regarding the property division and other issues," he said. "So, that was somewhat personal to me, and I think I really had something to do with the resolution of that dispute. Resolution to everybody."

In terms of his formal education, he explained that in Russia, it differs from the U.S.: There's no undergrad level of studies – basically after graduating high school, a student chooses a profession and a professional school to attend. When it came time for him to choose a career, the young Krepiy had been working for years on a children's television news show in addition to participating in another TV program focused on children's rights in Russia.



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That was 1993, he said, and he believes that's when he started taking a genuine interest in law and the legal profession.

"The other thing was I knew math was probably not my stronger side," he said. "I wanted to do something different. So, by the time I was getting close to graduation, from high school, I think I just basically thought going to law school would probably fit me well. And I think that was the right decision."

When he was 20 and still attending law school at Moscow State Academy, he emigrated to the United States with his mother and grandmother. He had finished three of the five years of law school while still in Russia but had to transfer to the home study program to finish his final two years, he said. Then, he flew back to Moscow to take the final state exam and earn his law degree.

In the United States, Krepkij began working as a receptionist and litigation assistant at a law firm in the Richmond District of San Francisco. The firm mainly did plaintiffs' work but also some corporate law. Within the first several months, Krepkij was promoted to legal assistant and office manager. But about a year and a half into his tenure, the firm shut down. Lucky for Krepkij, the firm's bookkeeper brought him over to another law firm, Meis & Associates, that was looking for an office manager, and they were doing almost 100 percent plaintiffs' law, he said.

"I worked there for nine years. I was their office manager, legal assistant and paralegal," Krepkij said. "I was really doing a lot of litigation support for a partner of that firm, Fred Meis. ... He was a prominent figure in the San Francisco legal community and passed away, unfortunately. He was a great mentor. ... He really taught me how to be ethical, how to be professional, how to just pick up the phone and call the firm's counsel, how to communicate

REDIRECT:

Getaway Spot: Alexander Valley-Russian River; Seattle

Go-To Music or Artist: Rock (Queen, Scorpions)

Recommended Reading: Autobiography books, Russian classic authors

Dream Job: The one I have

Words to Live By: "Live your life in such a way that you could wake up in the morning, look into the mirror and be able to respect yourself."

with clients, how to communicate with colleagues. He really gave me a lot of background."

During that time, Krepkij earned an MBA from Frederick Taylor University and a master's degree in law from University of San Francisco law school. Once that second firm closed down, he crossed paths with Dubrovsky, whom he had already known socially. He learned she was opening her own firm and reached out, and he said it's worked out great for the both of them.

Checking all angles

When recalling memorable cases, Krepkij cited one that may have seemed to be a simple, cut-and-dried accident to the untrained eye, but he and Dubrovsky delved deep into "why" their client was struck by a vehicle while crossing a freeway onramp in the East Bay. The man, who had already been living with some mental disabilities, suffered a severe brain injury in the crash, and the Dubrovsky team immediately went to the scene to figure out the reason the incident happened rather than just assuming the driver was to blame.

"There was a lot of discovery that was done and several issues that we were able to find," he explained, adding that there was supposed to be a pedestrian crossing installed, but the project was never completed. Pedestrians were crossing that onramp frequently, in fact, because that

was one of the only walkways to a nearby BART station, he said.

Those factors turned out to be very telling in Krepkij's case against the state of California for dangerous conditions of an onramp – a suit that otherwise could have been viewed as frivolous.

"When you just have a driver who clearly didn't see the pedestrian and then hit him, I think that was very important," Krepkij said. "And I think it's also important for us to appreciate that sometimes people make mistakes. But there are other circumstances that play a huge role in the mistake that they make.

"That's something, when we get a new case, we're really trying to look at very different angles to really get to the bottom of what happened," he added. "But the main thing is to figure out why it happened, and not try to get an easy way out."

The case ended up settling before trial for \$4.25 million, enough money, Krepkij said, to get the client into a facility and get the care that really helped him recover to a certain extent, helped take care of his family and enabled him to function at a much better level than if he had gone without care.

Active family man

When he's not in court or at the office, Krepkij enjoys spending time with his family. He is an avid hockey fan and tries to make it out to a few San Jose Sharks games each season while catching the rest on TV when he's able to. He also plays volleyball recreationally with the International Volleyball Group, a diverse organization that plays every Sunday in Golden Gate Park.

Then there's his odd fixation on being behind the wheel.

"This may really sound strange, but I love driving," he said. "I learned how to drive when I was back in Russia, and I always had stick-shift cars. ... Once, I was on a driving a trip to L.A., and there was an accident on the way back, so it took me nine hours, and I still enjoyed it; didn't mind at all."



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Finally, when he has spare time, Krepkiv helps his wife with her business, a Mexican restaurant called Death by Taco in the China Basin district of San Francisco, near Oracle Park. He said it's a

regular stop for a lot of baseball fans on their way to a game.

Krepkiy's advice to young lawyers or law students was short and sweet: "Be honest and hardworking," he said. "And

extend courtesy to opposing counsel. It will go a long way."

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