

Clients like Alex Jones, Fotis Dulos court disfavor for attorney Norm Pattis

By Daniel Tepfer



Fotis Dulos, center, listens, as his attorney Norm Pattis, left, addresses the court during a hearing at Stamford Superior Court, Tuesday, June 11, 2019 in Stamford, Conn. Fotis Dulos, and his girlfriend, Michelle Troconis, have been charged with evidence tampering and hindering prosecution in the disappearance of his wife Jennifer Dulos.

In 2005, Norm Pattis left the New Haven law firm he shared with his mentor, John Williams, and vowed he was giving up the law business to run a bookstore in Bethany.

Or so the story goes.

“Did I say that? I may have said that, I certainly wanted to spend more time in a bookstore,” Pattis said Thursday. “But I never stayed out of it (the law). The law is just too compelling, and I like

to fight and it’s hard to fight in a bookstore.”

He still owns Whitlock’s Book Barn. But Pattis is very much back, practicing law.

His name and quotes are all over the media for his representation of InfoWars host and conspiracy theorist Alex Jones, and now Fotis Dulos, the New Canaan builder who is a suspect in the disappearance and presumed

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– Defense attorney **Norm Pattis** speaking on his choices when taking difficult and unpopular cases

death of his estranged wife, Jennifer Dulos.

Pattis' representation of the two men has made him the most vilified lawyer in the state and, he said, brought him death threats.

He shrugs it off.

Pattis said the therapy he has undergone since his wife nearly died a decade ago helped him try to understand why he takes cases that are unpopular.

"My father abandoned me and my mother when I was 8," he said. "My mother remarried a man who was a violent drunk and despised me. I would often leave the home for long periods at a time.

"The experience of being hated in my own home and abandoned when I needed a father figure the most, I think, created a need to identify with people in similar circumstances," he said.

TOUGH CASES

Pattis certainly has represented his share of underdogs.

His recent cases include Tony Morena, who was convicted and sentenced to 70 years for dropping his infant son off a bridge in Middletown. And Patricia Daniels, the Bridgeport corrections officer convicted and sentenced to 16 years for a hit-and-run crash in the city

that killed a young mother and injured her son.

Pattis recently agreed to handle the appeal of Bridgeport nurse Jermaine Richards, who was convicted in a third trial of killing and dismembering a female college student.

He equates such cases to a tie baseball game in bottom of the ninth inning and the deciding batter is at the plate.

"I want to be that guy in the batter's box," he said.

It's been suggested that Pattis will take a case where there's little likelihood he will get much or any fee, for the fame.

It's a charge he kind of denies.

"Certainly, everyone wants to make a good living," he said. "Most of my cases end up finding me and not the other way around. They usually have gone through all the other lawyers and the expense before ending up on my doorstep. I'd like for once to be the one at the front of the line."

With his long hair pulled back into a ponytail, and a penchant for worn tweed jackets and battered-leather briefcases, Pattis looks like a 1970s college professor.

He is well-known — and not liked — for turning legal arguments into lectures aimed at judges and lawyers he sees

as inexperienced, and often publicly criticizes them in his blog.

But veteran prosecutors praise Pattis' skill and demeanor in the courtroom.

"Not only is he an outstanding lawyer, he is a formidable intellectual who is committed to the rule of law," said Senior Assistant State's Attorney Joseph Corradino. "He is covering the right flank of the First Amendment."

Added Senior Assistant State's Attorney Michael DeJoseph, "Norman is a brilliant attorney, very much a straight shooter, and he loves Michigan football."

SMILING AT A CHALLENGE

On this particular day, Pattis represented Tatiana Panchenkova, the daughter of a former Russian ambassador to the U.S, who claimed in a court hearing that her former husband, Shalva Chigirinsky — a Russian billionaire and pal to Vladimir Putin — sexually assaulted their 12-year-old daughter. Panchenkova wanted a judge to bar Chigirinsky from seeing the girl.

During a recess, after Pattis spent more than an hour battering Chigirinsky on the witness stand, the oligarch approached him in the courthouse hallway and warned

him, “You will lose because I have more money.”

Pattis responded by flashing that I-know-something-you-don't-know smile and simply said, “We’ll see.”

Retired Superior Court Judge Carmen Lopez hired Pattis in 2013 to contest the hiring of Illinois politician Paul Vallas as Bridgeport’s superintendent of schools. Although Pattis convinced a Superior Court judge that Vallas was not qualified for the job, the state Supreme Court later overturned that decision.

Still, Lopez said she was so happy with Pattis’ efforts in that case, she recommended him to others.

“Pattis is brilliant. I don’t know anyone who knows the rules of evidence as well as him,” Lopez said. “He has the courage to recognize an issue and call it what it is. In the Vallas case, there was a lot of political maneuvering, but he was not afraid to stand up to it.”

SOCIAL MEDIA INCIDENT

Lopez acknowledged that Pattis has had his controversies.

“But who hasn’t?” she said. “It shows he has some courage.”

In January, Pattis posted a photo depicting three white-hooded beer cans around a brown beer bottle hanging by

the neck from a refrigerator rack to his Facebook page. The caption read “Ku Klux Coors.”

Dori Dumas, president of the New Haven Chapter of the NAACP, called it “unacceptable, degrading and disgusting.”

“Candidly, P.C. police disgust me. I’m done with Facebook,” Pattis stated later. “Facebook censored it from a friend’s page. I reposted it to see it was true. Facebook pulled it. That’s ridiculous. I’m not going to give my data away to be told that I have to cater to the morbidly sensitive.”

In 2011, then-Bridgeport Mayor Bill Finch, with support from outside groups and six Board of Education members, dissolved the elected school board and replaced it with an appointed board.

Maria Pereira, one of the elected members ousted by the move, hired Pattis and sued.

Following an impassioned argument by Pattis, in which he proclaimed, “This is not the Connecticut I know,” the state Supreme Court ordered the city to return the elected board.

“When I first contacted Norm, he didn’t want anything to do with the case,” Pereira recalled. During a meeting with Kevin Smith, the lawyer who is now his partner, Pattis walked in.

“When (Pattis) heard the details of the case, he became so outraged he decided to take the case himself,” Pereira said.

“Norm Pattis is the P.T. Barnum of the courtroom; he’s a showman,” she said. “He is bad when it comes to the nitty-gritty details, but fortunately has Kevin Smith, who is really great with details.”

While Pereira praised Pattis for his work in the Board of Education case, she said she was not as pleased when she hired him for a subsequent education-related case.

“He likes to go into the courtroom and wing it, and I think he enjoys being controversial,” she said, “but that’s not always good for the client.” ■