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Inspiration, Bravery, and a Quest for Justice

Rachel E. Gusman reviews *Danger Above: A Tragic Death, An Epic Courtroom Battle* by Robert Zausner

I recommend this book for:

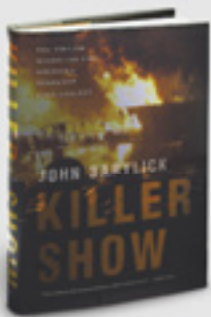
trial lawyers looking for renewed inspiration.

My top takeaway:

When caught in the battle of litigation, trust your gut!

I learned:

Litigation doesn't have to result in just monetary recovery—when possible, it should also result in remedial changes to ensure public safety.



You may also like:

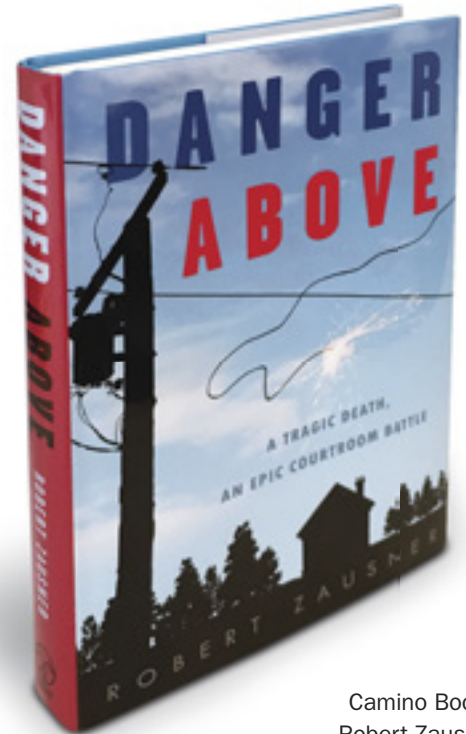
Killer Show: The Station Nightclub Fire, America's Deadliest Rock Concert
by John Barylick

In 2009, a fallen power line outside Carrie Goretzka's Pittsburgh home electrocuted her in front of her children. The West Penn Power Company, the utility that was responsible for maintaining the power line, was aware that the power line had fallen twice before the fatal incident and also knew that its installation techniques and employee training were insufficient.

Danger Above chronicles Philadelphia attorney Shanin Specter's successful quest not only to secure justice for the Goretzka family, but to overcome the utility's blame-the-victim defense. His efforts resulted in industry-wide safety reforms. The book will leave any impassioned litigator ready to take up arms.


Author Robert Zausner highlights the rigors of civil litigation—particularly when going up against multimillion-dollar companies. The book details the Goretzkas' gut-wrenching trial testimony; the battle of experts; the case's emotional, physical, and financial toll on the family and the attorneys; and the risky decision to turn down a significant settlement offer. But it also reminds readers to hold tight to their convictions despite enormous struggles.

Although the narrative conjures up all the feelings associated with a wrongful death trial—grief, anger, fear, uncertainty, and redemption—readers will find some solace and inspiration in the case outcome: The Public Utility Commission, with Specter's input, ordered West Penn Power to take remedial steps, such as increased employee training and power line inspections, that resulted in systemic safety improvements across the industry.



Camino Books
 Robert Zausner
www.caminobooks.com
 336 pp., \$32.00

Zausner brings readers into the courtroom with detailed accounts of Specter's direct and cross-examinations, opening, and closing. Specter's insights into juror selection and closing argument are enlightening. For example, during trial, Specter makes a gutsy move by walking out of the courtroom during the reading of a defense expert's transcribed testimony—conveying to the jurors that if he doesn't care to listen, they shouldn't either.

And while asking for punitive damages during closing, Specter tells the jurors to imagine West Penn Power as a person who has only \$10. How much would it take—a penny, a dime, or a dollar—to make that person not do it again? It is a simple yet profound analogy. One can't read this book without becoming inspired to be braver, to be more confident, and to take more risks. 

Rachel E. Gusman is a partner at Graves McLain in Tulsa, Okla. She can be reached at rachel@gravesmclain.com.