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TWENTY UNDER 40

Graham B. LippSmith, 31

Plaintiffs' Litigation
Girardi & Keese
Los Angeles

Opening statements had just begun in the biggest trial of Graham LippSmith's career.

The 30-year-old plaintiffs' lawyer was representing several adults who claimed to have been molested while living at a children's group home in West Covina in the 1960s and '70s.

His wife, MaryBeth LippSmith, was nine months' pregnant and silently cheering him on from the gallery when contractions began. A day later, LippSmith's son, Foster Bruce, was born.

Between long nights and diaper changes, LippSmith managed to secure a \$3.5 million verdict in *Deutsch/Mohr-McDermott v. Masonic Homes of California*. It was the first verdict of its kind in Los Angeles County and the first in a series of trials concerning 14 former residents.

"It was a crazy period. I don't know how I got through it," LippSmith says, before admitting that he considers the frenzied pace to be a job perk.

Growing up in Reno, Nev., LippSmith got a glimpse of the legal profession working for a family friend's criminal defense practice.

He graduated from Loyola Law School in 2002 but decided not to pursue criminal defense or corporate law, like many of his peers.



"I wanted to do something I could sleep at night doing. I wanted to be comfortable with who I was representing," he says. "And I haven't had a restless night in that regard yet."

LippSmith was drawn to plaintiffs' law for the opportunity it offered to jump into big-time cases from the get-go.

In 2007, LippSmith turned heads when he negotiated a \$17.5 million settlement in a federal ponzi scheme case, *Gonzales v. Lloyds TSB Bank*.

A Lloyds Bank client had been found guilty in criminal court of stealing \$90 million from investors in a foreign currency trading scheme.

"But the guys in jail weren't there to be held accountable for these regular people,"

LippSmith says, and small-time investors were out their life savings.

He argued that Lloyds and an accounting firm were aware of what had been going on and had been aiding and abetting the ponzi scheme in breach of fiduciary duty.

LippSmith sifted through hundreds of thousands of documents to prove Lloyds' liability, and the case settled before trial.

"His legal ability is far beyond his years," says Tom Girardi, founding partner of Girardi & Keese. "He has been given the most challenging assignments — he executes them like a lawyer who has been practicing many years longer than he has."

These days, LippSmith is busy juggling 30 cases. He recently took on Iranian-American UCLA student Mostafa Tabatabaiejad, who was Tasered by campus police after refusing to show a student ID card at the library. Tabatabaiejad believed he was a victim of racial profiling.

This winter, LippSmith is scheduled to try the largest Masonic homes molestation case to date, representing seven former residents.

"It's hard work and distressing. In these cases, so much of these people's lives are in your hands," he says. "These events — they were defining of their personality and psychology. We need to get them the validation they need to make them a tiny bit more comfortable about who they are."

— Cortney Fielding