

Civil Procedure: How Relief is Achieved in Law and in Life

“What was your daughter’s last message to you before she died?” was not a question I was expecting to hear on an otherwise ordinary Thursday, but it certainly snapped me to attention at 8:30AM.

I blink and it’s July 2019. It was the height of independent breweries in the Philippines when the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) ordered the recall and ban of Cosmic Carabao Gin after samples tested positive for high levels of methanol. The FDA warned that the consumption of Cosmic Carabao Gin could lead to methanol poisoning, which produces an array of alarming symptoms ranging from headaches and vomiting to blindness and death. This recall came on the heels of one reported death, a young woman whose name was never made public. Her name remains unknown to me, but now, I know her mother’s name: Maria Crizelda S. Liquigan, the plaintiff in a civil action for damages filed against Juan Brewing, the independent microbrewery behind Cosmic Carabao Gin.

In March 2025, the criminal case against this former darling of the craft beer community was dismissed by the Court of Appeals (CA) for insufficient evidence. Now, it is May 2026, and Mrs. Liquigan is on the witness stand in a modest courtroom of the Quezon City Regional Trial Court (RTC). She sits steadfast, ready for the continuation of her cross-examination. Across from her were Juan Brewing’s lawyers, dressed as stylishly as the bottles of artisanal alcohol this microbrewery once produced. They tried to make her waver; she never did.

Much of the questioning that morning centered on the last conversation Mrs. Liquigan had with her daughter: Were the text messages preserved or saved? How certain was she that the person typing the messages she received really was her daughter? Each counsel had reams of paper on their desks, affidavits, screenshots, photos, and forms all printed out. Mrs. Liquigan reviewed their contents, pointing to a particular word her daughter used – *owa*, her daughter’s term of endearment for her grandmother – the same word which opposing counsel said did not appear on the record, and which they moved to strike. The plaintiff’s counsel described what Mrs. Liquigan was pointing to, narrating the events for the record. He asked her to read the messages, describe them, and provide the court with more context about when and how that conversation took place. The opposing counsel pivoted their questioning.

The proceeding lasted a little over an hour, but I felt winded despite having spent the entire time just sitting and watching. As parties discussed the next hearing date, the judge asked the plaintiff’s counsel about the next witness, a doctor who could testify on the medical effects of methanol poisoning and the link to Cosmic Carabao Gin. Because this doctor is based in Mindanao, the plaintiff’s counsel orally moved for the issuance of a *subpoena ad testificandum* and *subpoena duces tecum* to require him to attend and testify at the next trial date, then moved to be deputized to serve the same. I perked up, hearing familiar words. The judge granted the motion orally, directing the counsel to coordinate with the clerk of court for the necessary issuances. That moment left me stunned: terms I had written down on flashcards were actively impacting an actual case, and it all happened far more quickly than I had expected. It’s one thing to see the mastery of rules measured in a classroom; it’s another thing entirely to see it moving in a court of law, compelling attendance, securing testimony, and ultimately shaping the development of a case.

Black’s Law Dictionary defines remedial law as “the means and methods whereby... wrongs [may be] redressed and relief [may be] obtained.” *Relief* can mean *damages*, but it can also mean *hope* – as in, a sigh of relief, a held breath released, a weight lifted from shoulders burdened by anger and grief.

Observing this civil case after the dismissal of the criminal case arising from the same act gave me a newfound appreciation of what I can only describe as the healing dimension of civil procedure. Even if criminal liability beyond a reasonable doubt cannot be established, the hope for justice still lives on in the preponderance of evidence. Riano describes civil procedure as “the rules which provide the system for the protection of these rights.” As future lawyers and aspiring advocates, it is all the more imperative that we learn them well so that our mastery may serve as a conduit through which the voiceless are heard.

The last message Mrs. Liquigan received from her daughter was a cry for help. She had drunk the gin. She was feeling sick and weak. Could she please come to her? Mrs. Liquigan was unable to answer her daughter’s prayer, but hopefully, through civil procedure, the court may yet grant hers.