

THE STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA
In The Court of Appeals

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SC Court of Appeals

APPEAL FROM BEAUFORT COUNTY
Court of Common Pleas

Carmen T. Mullin, Circuit Court Judge

Case No. 2016-001278

Mildred Ann Kinghorn as
Trustee for the Mildred Ann
Kinghorn Trust, dated 28
April 2004

Respondent,

v.

George Sakakini,

Appellant.

REPLY BRIEF OF APPELLANT

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DISCUSSION

I. THE RESPONDENT IS CORRECT IN NOTING CITATIONAL ERROR IN APPELLANT'S FIRST ARGUMENT, AND ERRONEOUSLY CONCLUDES THAT A DIFFERENT RESULT IS REACHED.

The Respondent, in her argument, was correct in her conclusion that the Appellant had inadvertently incorrectly cited the proposition at hand. However, the result does not change when the proper citation is applied. Appellant concurs that the controlling Rule of law is SCRCP 52. While Respondent is correct in stating that normally SCRCP 52 exempts motions from the findings requirements of SCRCP 52 which is the general rule; Appellant completely ignores, and invites this Honorable Court to ignore, the specific rule as set forth in SCRCP 52(a) which states in relevant part:

In all actions tried upon the facts without a jury or with an advisory jury, the court shall find the facts specially and state separately its conclusions of law thereon, and judgment shall be entered pursuant to Rule 58; and in granting or refusing interlocutory injunctions the court shall similarly set forth the findings of fact and conclusions of law which constitute the grounds of its action. Requests for findings are not necessary for purposes of review.

Respondent couches and styles this matter as a motion exempt under the general rule, but in reality and effect, it is a matter which the trial court tried upon the facts of the case without a jury. If there is but any question of whether or not this is the case one need only consult the Respondent in this matter.

Respondent asserts that “[t]he Court apparently looked at Appellant’s behavior and decided to discount the Appellant’s argument that it was always intended that Bank of America be a party and be a part of the approval process.” (Respondent’s Initial Brief, page 10). The Respondent openly acknowledges that the trial court was taking the evidence and analyzing it and applying the law to it. However, even Respondent is forced to conjecture what evidence the trial court considered which is precisely why in an action tried upon the facts; findings of fact

are required under SCRCP 52 regardless of how one styles the action for relief. Ultimately Respondent has to throw up her hands and admit that “[n]either party knows what facts, precisely, this Court based its decision on.” (Respondent’s Initial Brief, page 15). What is more critical and to the point, this Honorable Reviewing Court is left completely in the dark as to what facts the trial court considered or did not consider in her decision.

Moreover, it should be noted that this issue is injunctive (specific performance is an injunction to specifically act rather than to refrain from acting), and as a result would otherwise be completely interlocutory as previously briefed at the request of the Court. As a result, SCRCP 52(a) again under a separate provision mandates specific findings of fact and conclusions of law.

As stated in the Appellant’s Initial Brief, while South Carolina has not specifically dissected the cause of action, its sister courts have. Citing *Pathway Financial v. Schade*, 793 S.W.2d 464, 469 (Mo.App.1990), the Missouri Court of Appeals noted that “[a]lthough there is no rule defining the process for enforcing an agreement settling a pending case, one court-approved procedural device is a motion to enforce settlement.” *McKean v. St. Louis County*, 964 S.W.2d 470, 471 (Mo. App. E.D., 1998). Thus, “[a] motion to compel settlement, in effect, adds to a pending action a collateral action for specific performance of the settlement agreement.” *Landmark Frederick v. Heim*, 943 S.W.2d 343, 347 (Mo.App. S.D.1997). Under South Carolina jurisprudence, settlement agreements are viewed as contracts. *Harris-Jenkins v. Nissan Car Mart, Inc.*, 348 S.C. 171, 177, 557 S.E.2d 708, 711 (Ct. App., 2001). Thus, the “enforcement of the terms of a settlement agreement is a matter of contract law.” *Pee Dee Stores, Inc. v. Doyle*, 381 S.C. 234, 672 S.E.2d 799, 802, (Ct. App., 2008).

Therefore, in an action to compel a settlement whether it is called by the name of a motion or otherwise, the party seeking compulsion adds “a collateral action for specific

performance” of the settlement agreement, which under South Carolina law is viewed as a contract, and must be enforced in accordance with contract law. Under South Carolina contract law, the trial court was required to have the Respondent prove her case which meant: to establish at a minimum that there was a contract, or a valid meeting of the minds which was supported by full fair and valuable consideration; and that the agreement was ripe for execution at that time and without contingencies. This contract action is a “collateral **action**” which the trial court “tried on the facts without a jury... .” As a result, it unambiguously falls under the mandate of SCRCP 52(a) which requires detailed findings of fact and conclusions of law. This is particularly so because of its *oyer et terminer* nature. The **rationale** as set forth in *Bowen* has not been overruled save as to the limited circumstances regarding summary judgment motions. Thus, it remains in regard to actions tried on the facts without a jury that

an appellate court must determine whether the trial court's stated grounds for its decision are supported by the record. It is our duty to undertake a thorough and meaningful review of the trial court's order and the entire record on appeal. Where, as here, the trial court fails to articulate the reasons for its action on the record or enter a written order outlining its rationale, we simply cannot perform our designated function. *Bowen*, 342 S.C. at 235-36, 536 S.E.2d at 87-88.

The trial court’s form 4 orders completely failed to provide this Honorable Court with facts and an accompanying legal analysis sufficient to permit meaningful appellate review. Accordingly, the Court should remand the deficient orders to the trial court for action in accordance with SCRCP 52(a).

II. THE TRIAL COURT ERRED IN ISSUING A VAGUE ORDER IN VIOLATION OF THE DUE PROCESS PROTECTIONS OF THE SOUTH CAROLINA AND UNITED STATES CONSTITUTIONS.

In reply to the Respondent’s argument to this basis of appeal it is helpful to appreciate that the Respondent’s whole case at the trial level and at this level is to plead for the court to consider only evidence from the Respondent’s point of view, and reject anything from the

Appellant's point of view, particularly when it negates or qualifies that evidence put forth by the Respondent. This is illustrated very aptly by the Respondent's claim that "[i]t is interesting that Appellant has never claimed vagueness, ambiguity or confusion prior to this appeal."

(Respondent's Initial Brief, page 4). Such is **patently** false.

This appeal was filed on 13 June 2016. The court issued its order on 22 April 2016. On 27 April, five days after the vague order was issued the Appellant, in his Motion for Reconsideration, page 8, para 8, raises to the trial judge the following basis for reconsideration or amendment: "In a like manner, the Defendant respectfully asserts that the Order in question is **too ambiguous to be enforced. If the Court is going to specifically enforce something upon a party, the Order should clearly state what is being enforced.**" (R. p. 44, Para. 8.)

(Emphasis added.) Not only was the issue raised, but it was briefed in some significant detail.¹

How utterly disingenuous is the Respondent's proposition that this issue was not raised before the appeal. It was raised immediately after the vague and unconstitutional order was issued which was over a month and a half prior to the appeal. It was raised five days after it arose. However, what Respondent has completely failed to do is to show this Honorable Court that one can objectively examine the four corners of this order and determine what specific

¹ In a like manner, the Defendant respectfully asserts that the Order in question is too ambiguous to be enforced. If the Court is going to specifically enforce something upon a party, the Order should clearly state what is being enforced. All this Order states is that the Plaintiff's motion is granted. The only thing the motion states is that Plaintiff sought an "Order enforcing the settlement reached February 5, 2016, and further, awarding Plaintiff Attorney's Fees; and other costs associated with the enforcement of the settlement reached on February 5, 2016." The Plaintiff does not specifically say what she wants done. There was a lot of talk about quitclaims in her affidavits and at the hearing. Of course the settlement mentions nothing of quitclaims. It is not sufficient for the Court to say that the settlement will be enforced. If the Court is ordering specific performance, the Court must let the party charged with such performance know precisely what he or she is to do. Plaintiff also requested Attorney's Fees (in a grossly misrepresented amount). Did the Court's grant of her motion include such an award? Plaintiff also requested costs. Did the Court's grant of her motion include such an award? The Order is clearly ambiguous and does not specify what the Court expects Defendant to do to be in compliance with the agreement. It does not delineate whether fees and costs have been awarded and should be altered or amended to reflect the same. (Parenthetically, the Defendant notes that in addition to a misrepresentation of the time necessary to do the motion in question, the Plaintiff has submitted no affidavit in which a detailed itemization of fees has been submitted which would allow the court to review it and make an award of fees). (R. pp. 44-45.)

repeated throughout the Respondent's Initial Brief, it is Respondent herself who conclusively demonstrates a lack of bad faith on the Appellant's part. She denies that Bank of America is a necessary approval party. Appellant maintained that it was. In her brief she concedes that he was working with Bank of America on the matter. (Respondent's Initial Brief, p. 12). Whether it came to fruition or not, whether or not Bank of America was a necessary party, it shows that Appellant took steps toward getting the contingencies approved which even Respondent did not think was necessary.² That certainly negates bad faith.

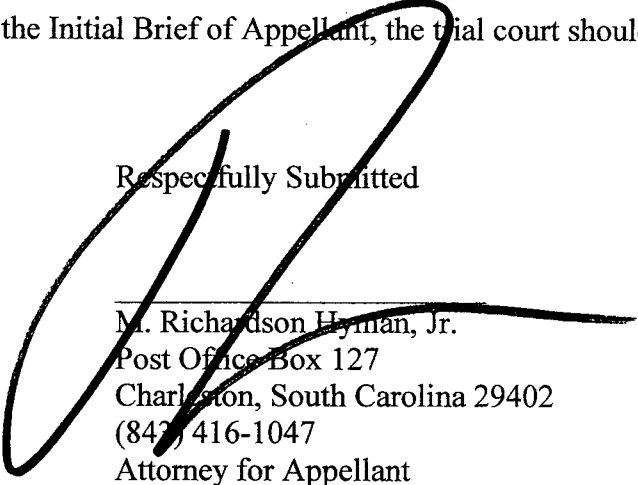
Of course, ultimately neither we nor this Honorable Court will ever know what the trial court was thinking in the ruling as there are no specific findings for this court to review which returns us to the beginning of this appeal.

CONCLUSION

For the reasons stated herein and in the Initial Brief of Appellant, the trial court should be reversed.

2 February 2017

Respectfully Submitted



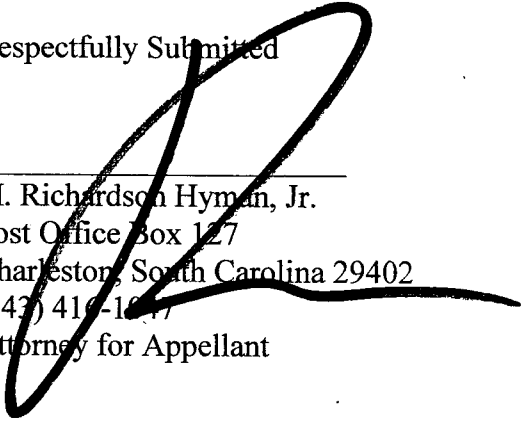
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² This action also demonstrated that it was contemplated by Appellant prior to the motion that Bank of America approval was necessary under the alleged settlement.

I certify that my final brief(s) are in compliance with SCRAP 211.

Respectfully Submitted

2 February 2017



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