

Why did you become a lawyer?

Two reasons — One is that my parents always taught me the important of getting a good education and as much education as you can get. Perhaps that's why their five children all have, at a minimum, a college education. Two is that I grew up heavily involved in athletics. I suppose I needed something to replace that competitive spirit that exists in sports. Therefore, I became a personal injury trial lawyer.

What do you wish you had paid more attention to as a student or new lawyer?

Legal research and writing. While I am fortunate enough now to be able to delegate some of those duties, the beginning years of being a lawyer were filled with difficult research and writing assignments.

What professor/event/issue did you enjoy most in law school?

I really enjoyed the trial advocacy classes. I remember Prof. James Carey and Judge Gino DiVito teaching me the ways of the courtroom. How ironic that I now teach Advanced Trial Advocacy at Loyola under these gentlemen whom I respect immensely.

What was the hardest thing to adjust to after graduating and beginning practice?

While law school provides the groundwork to becoming a lawyer, it does not necessarily teach you how to practice law. Thankfully, I had a wonderful mentor, David Rapoport, who taught me how to represent my clients leaving no stone unturned.

What is the one piece of advice you have for law students and future lawyers?

Choose your profession. Don't let your profession choose you. I see many new lawyers taking the highest paying job or the first job offer that's on the table only to be disappointed later on. Do what you are passionate about. Success and happiness will likely follow.

What do you like most about your practice?

Without question, the ability to make a difference in my clients' lives. Also, sometimes my practice has a positive effect on public safety. Not every case changes the world but some do. For instance, recently I represented a woman who was hurt from a defect that existed on the property of a strip mall. Not only did I get her fairly compensated for her damages but the property owner also remedied the defective condition.

Talk about a case that had the biggest impact on you and your client.

There are several. One that comes to mind was obtaining just compensation for a young man who was a victim of negligence. This is an actual quote from his mother: *"Words cannot express how grateful I am for what you did for my son. It has been a difficult few years for him and your care and concern for him, not only as a client, but as a person has helped him learn to trust again. It's obvious to me that you do your job with not just great ability, but with great heart. My son and I think of you often and the kindness you showed us and all the effort you put into his case. You would be happy to know that my son is going away to school in the fall and pursuing a Special Education degree, and you must know that you are a*

tremendous part of that. Thank you again, from the bottom of my heart, for all that you did for my son (and me)."

How important has networking been in your practice/career?

HUGE! Most people think that if you work hard, opportunities will arise. I was one of those people. That is usually only true to a small extent. Networking has been especially important in developing my own practice. I wish I would have started long ago, like when I was a student at Loyola, or earlier. While being a good technical lawyer is important, in my experience, it's the networkers who are getting the best jobs and developing the most business leading to job security and bigger paychecks.

What do you like most and least about being a lawyer?

Again, the thing I like most about being a lawyer is the ability to make a difference in my clients' lives. While it seems like a cliché, it's true. Even though personal injury lawyers are subject to more than our fair share of jokes, I'm proud to tell my children that I work hard to help people achieve justice.

What I like least about being a lawyer is that it's all consuming. There's very little time that passes where I am not thinking about my clients and what I have to do to help them. Doing what I do is a 24/7 job. There's no punching out at 5 for me.

Are most of your Loyola classmates still practicing law and what have you noticed about how your and their practices have changed over the years?

Unfortunately, I have not maintained contact with a lot of my classmates, which I regret. If I had to do law school over again, I would do a much better job of networking. I do remember going to a classmate's wedding several years ago and got to visit with several of my old Loyola friends. Several of them were disgruntled with being a lawyer. In fact, a good deal of them were no longer practicing law. This probably stemmed from them letting their area of the law pick them and not going after what they were passionate about.

What do you do in your free time?

There's nothing better than spending time with my kids. We particularly like hanging out outside when it's not so cold out. Last summer we started fishing, and I can see that becoming a family activity that we do often. Whether it's tossing a ball around outside or hanging out with my large family, togetherness is what it's all about in the Willens household.

Your favorite Chicago restaurant is...

I'm a pretty simple eater. Give me a good sandwich over fancy schmancy and I'm happy. That being said, I enjoy "Pannes Bread Café" in Chicago for a great sandwich. I also enjoy "Weiner Takes All" - a hotdog joint in Buffalo Grove. Not only is the food good, but the owner always makes us feel like appreciated customers. That's important to me.

