

ANDREW STEVENS

Forming a Reputation for Hard Work in PI Plaintiff's Cases

by Elizabeth Davies



Andrew P. Stevens grew up admiring his parents—a state trooper and a hospital secretary—but he wanted to be a lawyer.

Now, as a 30-year-old personal injury associate at Corboy & Demetrio PC, he is fulfilling that dream while still following in their footsteps.

“There’s a commonality among my parents and me,” Stevens says. “Often when my dad was at a scene on the road, someone was at the very worst time of their life. And when my mom was greeting someone in the ICU, it was often the worst time in their life.

“If you’re meeting me, it’s probably because you are at one of the worst times of your life. I’m able to bring some good to their families at a time when it’s awful. There are very few things as enriching as that.”

He’s quick to recall a case from earlier this year in which that was the exact circumstance. With colleagues Tom Demetrio and Susan Schwartz, Stevens represented a widower who lost his 52-year-old wife to a ruptured brain aneurysm.

In the days prior to her death, the woman had twice gone to the hospital with headaches but was sent home each time without brain scans. The Corboy team was prepared to go to trial with a negligence case against the hospital, alleging that a brain scan would have found evidence of an aneurysm before it ruptured.

The day before lawyers were to pick a jury

for trial, Corboy & Demetrio settled the case for \$4.5 million.

“Now, that settlement will never be able to bring back the love and companionship that were ripped away from this woman’s husband and daughter,” Stevens says. “But we were able to provide some security for two people who had their lives turned upside down by a hospital’s negligence, which tragically led to her death.

“Resolutions to cases are often bittersweet: We can help improve lives and do what we can within the law to ease some of the financial burdens. But rarely can we return a person to life as they knew it before a tragedy.”

Stevens’ early success and involvement in such notable cases might be a surprise to some. Even before his 30th birthday, Stevens was making waves with high-profile cases. In fact, a current case stems from an oil spill that occurred in 1988, before Stevens was even born.

But there’s really no secret to his quick rise in the profession. “It’s a mix of total luck and a lot of hard work,” he says.

Corboy & Demetrio partner Robert Bingle says Stevens’ work ethic is easily apparent.

“Andrew is an old-fashioned worker,” he says. “He will devote whatever time is necessary to get the job done, and he always accepts any responsibility with alacrity. He has an extraordinary knowledge of the law and evinces a maturity well beyond his years in analyzing a situation and developing a solution.”

PATHWAY INTO THE LAW

Growing up in south suburban Joliet, Stevens was an only child who knew early on that law school was in his future.

“I’ve known since grade school that I wanted to be a lawyer,” he says. “I looked up to my parents and the way they dedicated their lives to public service. So, I’ve always felt this duty to dedicate my life to serving people.”

With a passion for literature and writing, Stevens graduated from Providence Catholic High School with an inclination toward the law. He studied English literature at Saint Louis University, graduating *magna cum laude*, before returning to Chicago for law school at Loyola.

“I really found my niche going into my second year of law school,” he says. “I tried out for the mock trial team and loved it. The preparation, the practice—it was thrilling. I knew the second I started doing it that I wanted to do whatever I could to be in the courtroom.”

Stevens was a merit scholarship recipient and on the dean’s list in law school. He received CALI awards for the highest grades in Legal Writing I, Appellate Advocacy and Pretrial Litigation. He was founder and chair of Loyola’s Federal Bar Association and executive director of its Mock Trial Board.

Law school changed Stevens’ personal life course as well. It’s where he met his wife, Brittany Hartwig, now a lawyer at James J.

Roche & Associates. The pair were randomly chosen to work as trial partners for a class, and Stevens was smitten.

“She’s gorgeous, and she’s dangerously smart,” he says. “We put on one heck of a trial.”

Even today, Stevens says, “whenever there’s something outside of my wheelhouse, she’s the first one I go to.”

And she understands when the hardest part of the job keeps him awake.

“It’s the stress of thinking there might be an avenue I haven’t explored or a rock I haven’t overturned,” he says. “It’s a tremendous responsibility to help people, and sometimes that keeps me awake at night.”

A CRASH COURSE IN PROCEDURES

Stevens’ early experience came from the Cook County State’s Attorney’s Office, where he worked as a law clerk with a 711 license that allowed him to argue motions and examine witnesses in criminal trials.

He followed that up with what he calls an “invaluable experience” working as a law clerk to Cook County Circuit Judge James N. O’Hara.

“He’s one of the judges who has been there and done that,” Stevens says. “He went out of his way to groom me. Clerking there was a crash course in procedures.”

O’Hara appreciated the knowledge and insight Stevens brought to the job.

“He has an encyclopedic knowledge of the law—he can recite it chapter and verse,” O’Hara says. “And equally important is that he can apply it to the facts at hand and he can see the big picture. I’ve had some great law clerks, and I was so fortunate to have him as one.”

While clerking for the judge, Stevens kept up with the court’s portfolio of more than 1,400 pending cases. He also furthered his writing skills by drafting opinions and other legal documents. But perhaps more critical to learning was the fact that Judge O’Hara encouraged him to watch other trials.

“He would find courtrooms where some of the great lawyers were,” Stevens recalls. “He would say, ‘Take a stack of briefs and watch this trial.’”

“It was addicting. I was spending my afternoons reading the law and watching great lawyers.”

That’s how, in a short period of time, Stevens was able to ascertain the qualities that made exceptional lawyers rise above the pack.

“Great lawyers are constantly thinking about how the jury views them and their clients,” he observes. “They are consummate professionals. They know the deputy’s name, the court clerk’s name. They hold doors open for people. They are genuine and true to themselves.”

So, when the opportunity arose for Stevens to go into private practice in 2016, he knew

exactly the kind of lawyer he wanted to be.

“Personability is something that comes easily to me,” he says. “I’ve learned that credibility is of vital importance. After watching all those trials, it’s something I’m constantly thinking of.”

Corboy & Demetrio has been the perfect place to launch a practice like that. He had clerked at the firm prior to working for the judge and knew it would be a great fit as he developed as a top personal injury litigator.

“I was so impressed by the work, I knew I wanted to work here,” he says.

WORKING ON TRAGIC CASES

At Corboy & Demetrio, Stevens is forming a reputation as an up-and-comer in aviation litigation. At present, he is on the firm’s team that is representing families who lost loved ones in recent Indonesian and Ethiopian airplane crashes.

Those fatal crashes, which happened



Tutoring Caleb through Lawyers Lend-A-Hand at the CBA as Justice Anne M. Burke looks on



With wife Brittany in Streeterville’s Milton Olive Park



Reading *If You Give a Moose a Muffin* to son Jack



From left: father Mark Stevens, mom Gail Stevens, Stevens, wife Brittany, mother-in-law Michelle Johnson, stepfather-in-law Dr. Tom Johnson at a Phoenix wedding

within five months of each other, are being scrutinized because both occurred in the same type of Boeing airplane that recently hit the commercial aviation market. Stevens' cases are still in their infancy in federal court, but he hopes they will result in safer air travel moving forward.

"It's a safe way to travel, but there were people in a board room who forgot that the numbers on their spreadsheets were faces, were

humans, were families," he says.

The financial exposure of Boeing in these cases is still unknown.

"Until we learn more about the devastating effects on the families of the victims, we wouldn't want to put a number on that," he says.

Stevens also has a very different case on his plate. Along with partners Robert J. Bingle and Kenneth T. Lumb, Stevens represents about 70 people from the Kankakee area who claim they

became sick after a 1988 Shell Oil pipeline spill contaminated the community's drinking water.

In that instance, more than 100,000 gallons of oil seeped into a field, and six years later a large amount of gasoline chemicals showed up in a community well, Stevens says. The case suggests that residents were found to have developed a form of cancer known to be caused by gasoline chemicals. In some instances, those people have died.

"We have people with many types of cancer, including two Limestone residents who developed a very rare brain cancer who lived just a few houses from each other," he says. "It's a statistical anomaly. The people who lived there have been breathing air and drinking water contaminated by gasoline chemicals."

At times, Stevens has found that cases stick with him because of the people involved, more than the verdict or the circumstances.

He recalls a family who lost their 19-year-old son when the car he was riding in was struck by a drunk driver.

"I was working on that case when my son was born," he says. "When you have a child of your own, it redefines love."

The case caused Stevens to understand the depth of loss that grieving parents experience. He learned to listen, help and ease his clients' burdens. Today, Stevens continues to stay in contact with that family—they even sent a baby gift in the midst of their tragedy. And he has a new perspective because of that case.

"What I do every day took on a new meaning," he says. "Now I see everyone as someone's son or daughter."

WHAT THE FUTURE HOLDS

Under the wing of experienced partner Demetrio, Stevens knows he is getting legal training others could only hope for.

"I think I'm the luckiest lawyer in Chicago to be able to call Tom Demetrio my mentor," he says. "I can feel how important it is to him to show me the right way to practice law."

They do that with daily conversations—about lawyering, about parenthood, about life. Stevens is able to watch Demetrio's work up-close, finding the aspects that have created a successful career so he can attempt to duplicate them.

"One of the things that sets Tom apart is that he is a tremendous advocate because his instincts are off the chart," Stevens says.

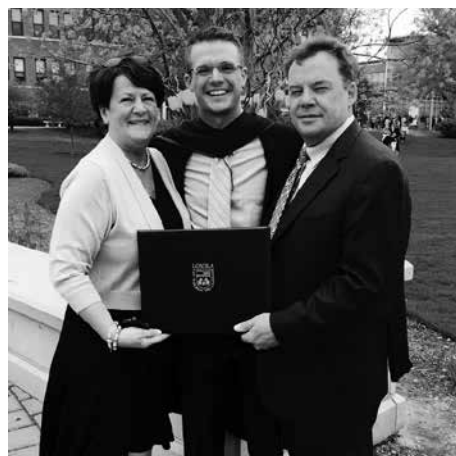
As for Stevens, Demetrio has been impressed with his associate's tenacity.

"Even when the task is finished and he's found the answer, he inquires further," Demetrio says. "He is always ready to jump into the fray while exhibiting patience and a mature level of compassion for the plight of his clients. He exudes confidence without arrogance."

Demetrio has brought Stevens in on some



Stevens and wife Brittany at their Chicago wedding



Stevens with parents at his law school graduation



Son Jack and Stevens in South Haven, Michigan



Taking in a Cubs/Cards game with his father. The duo have been to 27 of 30 MLB parks so far.

of his most complicated legal matters because he knows the younger lawyer is reliable.

“Prior to a major argument or trial, Andrew is my go-to guy,” Demetrio says. “He manages day-to-day matters, which allows me to concentrate on strategy and work on the big picture.”

Working so closely with his mentor has given Stevens a vision of what his end game should be.

“I don’t need to try a certain number of cases or get a certain number of awards,” he says. “I just want to work to help families as long as I can. And I would love to be the lawyer Tom Demetrio is—or even half of that. He’s an awesome role model.”

Stevens himself has proven to be quite a role model in his short career. He volunteers as the coach for the Loyola University Chicago School of Law criminal law mock trial team, and he takes his students to competitions across the country as they test out their legal prowess as well. He was named 2018 Mock Trial Coach of the Year by Loyola for his role there.

“The mock trial program was so beneficial for me,” he explains.

Also, Stevens serves on the auxiliary board for the Chicago Bar Association’s Lawyers Lend-A-Hand program. Through the program, lawyers are paired with students from South Side public schools to help with schoolwork over the course of a year. A past tutor, Stevens feels strongly about Lend-A-Hand’s ability to help children, and he wants to see it grow.

But when he isn’t working or volunteering, there’s a good chance you’ll find Stevens with a baby in tow. With 1-year-old son John Andrew —“Jack”—at home, Stevens is thankful for his firm’s approach to work-life balance. While his workload clearly increases heading into trial, his normal work schedule allows him to enjoy his son most evenings.

“The times that we aren’t on trial, I get to enjoy a lot of time with him,” Stevens says.

That’s because family time remains of utmost importance for Stevens. He has remained close with his parents as they’ve moved into retirement. Stevens and his father have made a point of visiting Major League Baseball stadiums across the country over the past eight years. They’ve made it to 27 of the league’s 30 stadiums together. The remaining ones include both New York City stadiums—Yankee Stadium and Citi Field.

The iconic Fenway Park, home of the Boston Red Sox, will be their final stop.

“It’s something I’ll always remember and a great way to see the country with my dad,” he says. “It’s meant a lot to me.” ■