

Inside Out > column



By Christina Martini
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By David Susler
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Life-shaping moments

Here's another installment of Inside Out with law firm partner Christina Martini and in-house counsel David Susler.

They are not only lawyers who practice on different sides of the table, they are also married.

Watch them talk more about this topic with the Better Government Association's Andy Shaw at chicagolawyer.com.

You have been doing the Inside Out column for 3½ years. Let's tell readers a little more about your lives.

Where did you grow up and who or what from your childhood had the greatest impact on your life?

Martini: I grew up in Highland Park, a suburb of Chicago. I am the third of four children and the only girl.

I am blessed to have a wonderful family of extremely intelligent, talented, down-to-earth individuals who have been a great source of inspiration for me.

We all have science backgrounds, and as I attended engineering school, I drew a lot of support from them. It was not easy being one of very few women in the field more than 20 years ago.

When I was a senior in high school, my mother passed away suddenly. I was very close to her and her death was devastating and completely changed my life going forward. From that moment, I was forced to be independent and self-sufficient.

I also felt responsible for making a positive difference in the world and for making my family proud. My mom was Latina and aspired to be a doctor.

She was brilliant and most certainly capable, but of a generation which made it very difficult for her to fulfill her dream.

As the next generation, I feel it is my responsibility to help break down those barriers.

Susler: I grew up in Decatur, a central Illinois city then of about 95,000 people.

To choose one thing of greatest impact is difficult but I have to say our family dinner conversations as I was growing up played a key role.

My father was a lawyer and we often discussed his cases.

This was not merely my dad telling stories. He presented various factual scenarios to elicit discussion and along the way taught such life tools as logic, ethics and the importance of making a positive difference in the world.

Those were always my favorite conversations and a large part of the foundation of why I became a lawyer.

When and why did you decide to go to law school?

Martini: I started law school in 1991 at Northwestern. I enrolled because I was intellectually curious about the law.

Up until that point, all of my academic and work experiences had been focused on the sciences and engineering and I felt drawn to this other world of precise communication with words rather than with numbers.

I have always loved to read and write and engineering does not afford many opportunities to do that, so that excited me about the law as well.

Susler: I decided as a young child I wanted to be a lawyer.

Building on our family dinnertime conversations, as well as the general principles I learned from my parents and my religion, I knew I wanted to help people, to make a difference and the law seemed to be the best vehicle by which to accomplish these goals.

Share with us a little-known fact or two about you.

Martini: Most people think I am very extroverted when they meet me.

People who know me well understand that I am actually quite shy and an introvert.

In addition, there were a number of other careers I explored before becoming a lawyer. These included being an engineer, pharmacist and a professional baseball player.

As a left-handed pitcher, I threw a pretty effective curveball.

Susler: I won an archery tournament at summer camp when I was 8 or 9 years old. Also, most people know I am a lifelong Bruce Springsteen and Bob Dylan fan, but they may not know my current guilty music pleasures are Kelly Clarkson and Carrie Underwood.

What would you do if you were not a lawyer?

Martini: When I was 8 years old, I began carrying around a tape recorder and microphone with me everywhere I went.

I had my own pretend radio station and "reported" current events and played music. I was passionate about it.

If I were not a lawyer, I would probably be a multi-media journalist, disc jockey or record producer.

Susler: Being a lawyer is so much a part of who I am that this is always a difficult question for me.

The only other career I ever seriously considered was being a rabbi. If I could no longer practice law, I could see fashioning a new career doing something with diversity and inclusion.

Being a scuba-diver would also be a lot of fun. ■

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