

# Class act

## Pittsburgh attorney enjoys going to 'battle' for clients

By Brian Cox

The trajectory of attorney Frank Salpietro's successful law career can be traced back to a rainy day in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania when as a bored 8th-grader he had nothing better to do than take a random book off a living room shelf and peruse it.

The book was "You and the Law: A Practical Guide to Everyday Law and How it Affects You and Your Family" by Reader's Digest. He happened to come across a table that listed the legal age for marriage in each state and was curious to note that in one state the age was 5 – clearly it was a typo, but it was enough to pique his interest and he continued reading. He was hooked.

"For me that was a moment that sticks out," says Salpietro. "I read that and thought, 'You know what? This is pretty interesting. Let me find out more about this stuff.'"



Salpietro's parents commissioned this painting for their restaurant, where it hung for years. It now has a place of honor in Salpietro's home where a family gathering included (l-r) his father, Vincent; his sister, Mary Grace; his son-in-law, Shawn, and his son, Francesco; and his daughter, Isabella.



He still has the book that started it all on a shelf at home.

Decades later, Salpietro now heads up the Commercial and Business Litigation Group at Rothman Gordon in Pittsburgh where he has forged a national profile as a class action attorney with several multi-million-dollar verdicts to his credit.

Though he has spent the majority of his life in Pittsburgh, Salpietro was actually born in a small Sicilian town called Raccuja, located in the mountains outside Messina. His parents immigrated to the U.S. when he was two. His father, Vincent, found work as a sous-chef at a high-end restaurant in Pittsburgh, eventually becoming an executive chef before opening his own restaurant in 1977. Called Salpietro's, the restaurant was known for its veal, pasta, and seafood.

When Salpietro was in law school, he recalls tending to gravitate over to the restaurant most nights after class.

"At the end of the day there was always a good meal waiting," he says.

A painting his parents commissioned for the restaurant now hangs in Salpietro's living room as a family heirloom and an homage to the name his parents built for themselves.

In high school, Salpietro played baseball and football and there was some thought that he might have a shot at making the Major Leagues, but he remembers learning about the forensics team at a school assembly and he left sports to debate. His time on the debate team solidified his choice of profession.

"I like to battle, I don't know how else to put it," he says. "My adrenalin flows when I'm able to think on my feet and move forward with a cogent argument."

After earning an undergraduate degree in political science at Emory University in Georgia, Salpietro returned home to attend the University of Pittsburgh School of Law, where he was an editor of the Law Review and received the Benjamin Teplitz Memorial Award for having the highest grades in his class. He graduated summa cum laude.

It was while he was in law school that he met his future wife, Janice. She was his youngest sister's third grade teacher at the Catholic grade school he'd also attended. He noticed her when he was picking his sister up from school one day. He remembers telling his sister, "I think I'm going to pick you up every day." When his sister grasped his interest in her teacher, she asked to interview her in class and asked questions along the lines of "so

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if you were going to go out on a date, where would you go?”

“I swear I didn’t put her up to it, but I got a lot of good information from her,” says Salpietro with a smile. “We started dating in the summer, and the rest is history.”

Salpietro and Janice have been married for 35 years and have four children. Their eldest son, Vincent, is a scenic design professor at Nazareth College’s Theater Design and Technology Department. Their son, Francesco, studied opera at the University of Michigan and is now a lawyer working in mergers and acquisitions. Their third son, Nicholas, is a civil engineer, and their daughter, Isabella, is a speech language pathologist.

In his third year at Pitt Law, Salpietro began clerking with Meyer, Unkovic & Scott, a mid-size law firm where he was hired after graduating.

“I thought a mid-size firm would have better opportunity for more immediate growth and more of a life-work balance, which was always important to me,” says Salpietro, who stayed with the firm 22 years.

He second-chaired a trial a week after passing the bar and found early success prosecuting cases, mostly on the plaintiff’s side.

“Part of the draw of being in the courtroom is the opportunity to persuade a jury your position is right,” he says. “I like the dramatics of it, so to speak. Over the years, I’ve spent a lot of time figuring out how to best persuade a jury. The dramatic element intrigues me.”

His litigation experience includes complex commercial and business disputes, insurance coverage, lender liability, fraud, trade secrets, real estate and leasing concerns, gaming matters, and class actions. He says his class action experience has allowed him to give hundreds of thousands of individuals and consumers a voice in the courts, helping correct wrongs done to them by major retailers, banks, employers, and utility companies.



Salpietro and his wife Janice took a cruise for their honeymoon. Since then, their cruises have taken them to Alaska, the Caribbean and Europe, where Salpietro took this photo of Dubrovnik, Croatia.



Frank Salpietro and his family enjoy taking cruises whenever possible. The family took a cruise around Argentina, which included a stop at Ushuaia, the farthest you can go in South America before hitting Antarctica. The Salpietro family include (l-r) Nicholas, Janice, Vincent, Francesco, and Isabella.

It was, in part, his interest in further developing his class action practice that influenced his decision to join Rothman Gordon in 2008 when the firm’s managing partner, Bill Lestitian, approached him to talk about heading up the firm’s litigation group. Founded in 1954, Rothman Gordon’s litigation practice focused on employment law.

Salpietro says the time was right and the stars aligned for him to make the move.

“I think Bill envisioned he needed to bolster the commercial litigation part of the firm,” he says. “He knew of me and what I had done at Meyer Unkovic. That was a big factor in getting me over here.”

Salpietro embraced the collegiality at Rothman Gordon and its culture of consensus building.

“One thing that keeps us around is that we all get along,” he says. “And that’s been the culture since the beginning of the firm 70-plus years ago.”

Salpietro brought a foundation of clients with him that he continued to build on, resolving to build a plaintiff class action practice, which now forms the bulk of his work. Most of the class actions he has in the pipeline are consumer-type cases, he says.

He has headed up successful class action lawsuits against major retailers, banks, and national restaurant chains. He is a life member of both the Million Dollar Advocates Forum and the Multi-Million Dollar Advocates Forum, has an AV-Preeminent rating with Martindale-Hubbel, and has been named in Best Lawyers in America since his election by peers in 2012.

His reputation fuels his practice.

“Once you get some coverage on a consumer class action, you’d be surprised how many people all of a sudden start calling you,” he says. “All it takes is one good one, and we’ve had a couple good ones.”