

Q & A

Q & A with Michael Weinstein



Michael Weinstein, a partner with Ferris & Britton in San Diego, joined the firm in September 1988, after practicing for six years with the Law Department of San Diego Gas & Electric Co. He received his law degree in 1982 from UCLA, where he was an editor of the UCLA-Alaska Law Review. He also received his undergraduate degree in economics in 1979 from UCLA, graduating summa cum laude and Phi Beta Kappa.

Weinstein heads the firm's litigation department and handles all types of business litigation matters, including but not limited to business-to-business and employment disputes, from pre-litigation through resolution by way of settlement, alternative dispute resolution, court trial, or jury trial.

He and his wife Dana, a retired attorney, reside in San Diego, and have three daughters and six grandchildren.

Q: Before becoming an attorney, what was your first job?

A: My first job was in high school in Fall 1973 – I worked at Jack-in-the-Box for a whopping \$1.95 per hour!

Q: What motivated you to pursue a legal career?

A: Most of my family went into the medical profession – doctors, oral surgeons, dentists, nurses, and pharma. I had little or no interest in science in school, so medicine was out of the question. On the other hand, I was always drawn by stories of justice/injustice – e.g. Les Misérables, To Kill a Mockingbird, Crime and Punishment – so a law career was more enticing to me.

Q: Who was your chief mentor and how did he or she influence your career?

A: Among the several mentors I was blessed with, my chief mentor was Chris Britton, who hired me in 1988 at my current firm. He entered the picture late as mentors go as I had already been practicing law for 6 years. Chris, now retired from the firm, is (still) a voracious reader, published author and a gifted storyteller. He can take something complicated and simplify it into a compelling, persuasive story. His strengths were attributes that were not my strengths but that I aspired to. We bonded over sports and are still close today. He had a thirst for knowledge that knew no bounds and he had a disciplined work ethic that he developed as a Marine officer and lawyer. Whenever faced with a problem – professional or personal – he was the type of person that stepped forward first and led by example. He commanded respect by his actions. His greatest influence on me is simply as a role model for how to be a leader and how a human being can and should act towards another human being.

Q: What's the best piece of advice you've ever received?

A: The best advice I ever got was advice that I chose not to follow. On the day of my wedding in August 1982, my dad offered the following: "Mike, the older you get the more you will learn that people suck. The sooner you learn that the better off you will be" (or something to that effect). I have tried my best to not adhere to that belief. Although I am no stranger to cynicism, I have done my best in my personal and professional life to try and give others the benefit of the doubt and see the best in people. Frankly, I never saw the upside in that view of the world.

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Q: What is one thing you would like to learn to do?

A: I would like to learn to speak Mandarin (at least well enough to be useful while traveling in China).

Q: What is your proudest career achievement?

A: My wife, Dana, and I, have raised three very independent daughters (31, 34, and 36) who left the nest during college and have moved forward with their own lives, careers, and families.

Professionally, my most satisfying case result was a pro bono case for a 76-year-old lady (the mother of a friend) who owned a home with her husband to whom she had been married for over 50 years. They needed cash and in 2007 entered into a reverse mortgage thinking that whichever of them survived the other would be able to continue to live in their home mortgage-free until the survivor passed. The bank, which was both the marketer and lender for the reverse mortgage, did not disclose to her that the reverse mortgage loan had been structured so that, if her older husband died first, the entire loan would become due and payable. When in 2011 her husband, in fact, died first, the bank called the loan and initiated foreclosure. We sued. The case settled with the bank agreeing to let her continue to live in the home without mortgage payments for the remainder of her life. She will turn 87 years old in mid-May 2022 and has continued to live in the house without interruption as the result of the settlement.

Q: What other career path might you have chosen?

A: Structural engineer.



Mike and wife Dana on 40th Anniversary, with 3 daughters and their spouses and 6 grandkids

Q: What is your most treasured material possession?

A: An original watercolor painting of three young girls walking along the beach in Coronado. They remind me of my daughters. After I saw the painting at an art show and learned it had already been purchased, I commissioned the artist to paint an original of the same scene for me.

Q: What is your happiest childhood memory?

A: Many, mostly to do with playing sports as a kid. But as a family, my favorite memory is a 7-day rafting trip on the Colorado River when I was 13 years old.

Q: What is your favorite movie and book?

A: Favorite book, *Shogun*, by James Clavell. Favorite book, movie, and play (not the musical) – *Les Misérables*. I like the movie version starring Anthony Perkins as Jaubert.

Q: What is the most awe-inspiring place you have visited?

A: Although I would not call it awe-inspiring, my favorite place so far that we have visited was Istanbul.

Q: What are your favorite leisure time pursuits?

A: Currently: Camping with kids/grandkids; tournament poker.

Q: What is your favorite famous or inspirational quote?

A: One of my favorite quotes is from *Inherit the Wind*, based on the Scopes Trial, when Col. Henry (played by Spencer Tracy) says to the judge: “.... [F]anaticism and ignorance is forever busy, and needs feeding....” Sadly, I think this is true today as it was before.

The full quote is as follows: “Can’t you understand? That if you take a law like evolution and you make it a crime to teach it in the public schools, tomorrow you can make it a crime to teach it in the private schools? And tomorrow you may make it a crime to read about it. And soon you may ban books and newspapers. And then you may turn Catholic against Protestant, and Protestant against Protestant, and try to foist your own religion upon the mind of man. If you can do one, you can do the other. *Because fanaticism and ignorance is forever busy, and needs feeding.* And soon, your Honor, with banners flying and with drums beating we’ll be marching backward, BACKWARD, through the glorious ages of that Sixteenth Century when bigots burned the man who dared bring enlightenment and intelligence to the human mind!”

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Q: Who is on your guest list for the ideal dinner party?

A: Under the assumption that I can bring the dead back to life, in addition to Dana and me, I would have: my three daughters, their husbands, and then: Ruth Bader Ginsburg; Stacey Abrams; and Oksana Masters (along with their plus-ones). I have a table in my backyard that can seat 14 – so 14 people would fit comfortably.

Ask me next week, and I would have a different, equally eclectic, list. Probably should have quarterly dinner parties.

Q: What are the top three items on your bucket list?

A: Play in the Main Event of the World Series of Poker. A trip or trips to the Far East (China, Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam, and Japan). I AM SAVING THIS THIRD SPOT.