

# Q & A

## Q & A with Jerry Weitzel

Jerry Weitzel is a trial attorney concentrating his practice in the field of commercial litigation with a focus on construction, real estate, admiralty, employment, and contract disputes. The co-managing partner of Kozacky Weitzel McGrath, P.C. in Chicago, Illinois, Weitzel also represents clients in professional liability matters involving architects, engineers, and real estate brokers and agents.

A graduate of Loyola University, where he earned a Bachelor of Arts in English, Weitzel has experience in a wide variety of complex litigation matters, including partnership and member disputes, construction litigation, real estate brokerage fee disputes, licensing disputes, and pension benefit claims. An alumnus of DePaul University College of Law, he has tried cases in both federal and state courts and has argued before the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 7th Circuit on more than one occasion.



Jerry Weitzel sharing a toast with his wife, Maureen.



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

**A:** I had my first job when I was a sophomore at a military boarding school. There was a pallet factory in town and the owner would call my school and ask for two to four boys to come work from 6 a.m. to noon on Saturday mornings breaking up old pallets. The work was frankly pretty dangerous due to splintering wood and nails everywhere, and by the end of the six hours I was covered in soot, including inside my nose and ears. All that for \$3 an hour. It taught me the value of hard work and that I definitely didn't want to break up pallets for the rest of my life.

### **Q: What motivated you to pursue a legal career?**

**A:** Money and prestige. Just kidding. I would say that I've always had an overdeveloped sense of justice, and I thought that the law was the best place to utilize it. As it turns out, I now often hear myself telling clients, "that courthouse doesn't dispense justice, it dispenses money." Nevertheless, there are still opportunities for us to obtain just results for our clients, and I cherish those occasions.

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

**A:** I would not say I had a chief mentor. The managing partner at the firm I clerked at during law school and then practiced with for the first five years of my career was not quite what I'd call a mentor, but I learned a lot from him about taking responsibility for my work, attention to detail, and being properly prepared. Also, when I went to work for my now partner, then boss, Paul Kozacky, he mentored me on developing my writing style by helping me see that legal briefs need not be dry and without personality.

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

**A:** To always be the most prepared person in the room.

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

**A:** I would like to re-learn Japanese. I spent five years in Kobe and Tokyo as a child and spoke the language well but have lost it over the years. I'd love to travel back there with my sons and be able to communicate wherever we went.

**Q: What is your proudest career achievement?**

**A:** As a trial lawyer, it has to be obtaining jury verdicts for my clients. All of them have been meaningful in their own way, but the most recent stands out for me. It was a plaintiff's whistleblower employment case (not the typical case we handle at the firm) and the deck was stacked against my client in many ways, but we emerged victorious and the relief and level of gratitude from my client was something I'll never forget.

**Q: What other career path might you have chosen?**

**A:** Growing up, and in college as an English major, I thought I'd go into publishing as an editor and then hopefully as a writer. I have a handful of novels in the works. Maybe someday I'll commit to finishing one of them!



A hair-raising photo of Jerry Weitzel at the threshold of a waterfall in Iceland.



Atop the Empire State Building, Jerry Weitzel enjoys the panoramic view of New York City with his sons, Owen and Alex.

**Q: What is your most treasured material possession?**

**A:** That's a tough one. An uncle who passed away several years ago was one of my favorite people. He beat addiction in early adulthood and then spent the next 40 years counseling others with addiction issues. When he passed away, my aunt gave me his 20-year sobriety coin from AA. I keep it on my desk as a reminder of him and how he was able to become the caring and supportive person he was. I also have a few items that belonged to my father that I treasure. One of them is the gold Cross pen that he always used. I keep it in my leather portfolio and never actually use it myself, but every time I open the portfolio to take notes at a meeting, deposition or hearing, it gives me a reminder of him.

**Q: What is your happiest childhood memory?**

**A:** Growing up in Asia, my family would stop in Hawaii for a week or two each way coming and going from the States during the summer. I have great memories of time spent body surfing on the beaches of Maui and Kauai when they were much less populated than they are today.

**Q: What is your favorite movie and book?**

**A:** I have many favorite books, but the one I've been recommending lately is "A Man Called Ove" by Fredrick Bachman. I discovered him late in life, so I'm starting to read all his books now. Favorite movie is also difficult, but I'll go with "Reservoir Dogs."

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

**A:** I would have to say Iceland. The stark beauty and majestic waterfalls make it like no other place I've been.



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**Q: What are your favorite leisure time pursuits?**

**A:** Reading, hiking, skiing, and watching my younger son play hockey.

**Q: What is your favorite famous or inspirational quote?**

**A:** "Get busy living or get busy dying."

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

**A:** No one famous. Just my friends and family who I thoroughly enjoy talking and laughing with.

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

**A:** Take a trip back to Japan. Finish writing a novel. To see my sons safely into adulthood.



Canines Thor and Echo are key members of the Weitzel family.