

Q & A

Q & A with Bob Bivins



Robert “Bob” Bivins is a founding partner and the managing partner of Bivins & Hemenway, P.A. in Tampa, Fla.

Bivins, who earned his law degree from the University of Florida with honors in 1985, focuses his practice on commercial, business law, and real estate transactions. He is a third generation Tampa Bay Area resident, who in addition to his legal practice is involved in property management, cattle ranching, and other agricultural enterprises.

An alumnus of the University of South Florida, Bivins is a member of the Primerus™ Board of Directors and the Primerus™ Quality Assurance Board.



Bob Bivins with his mother, Vandy, on his graduation day from the University of Florida College of Law in Gainesville.

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

A: I started out working as a child at my dad’s electronic communications business, cleaning and sorting parts for \$3 a week when I was in elementary school. By high school, I was working at an Italian restaurant as a busboy. My first adult jobs were working as a meter-reader for our local electric utility during my early years of college and later in the comptroller’s office at a bank in Clearwater, Florida until leaving for law school. So, I had a fairly broad swatch of work experiences before I started clerking at law firms.

Q: What motivated you to pursue a legal career?

A: For as long as I can remember my parents were pushing me to either be a doctor or a lawyer. I couldn’t stand the sight of blood, so medicine was a no-go. Although communications and writing were always a strength of mine, because my parents pressed the legal track so hard, I was resistant. I considered journalism, astronomy (yes, I’m serious), and banking before taking the LSAT and scoring so high that I couldn’t really come up with a great argument against going to law school. Plus, I wasn’t making much in my banking job even though I was on a fast track to senior management. So, I cut a deal with my father that I would try law school for a semester, but he would support me if after that I decided to go back to banking. As it turns out, I loved law school and thrived in that environment so once I got my sea legs there I never looked back.

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

A: I had two. The first was Parker Lee McDonald, who was the chief justice of the Florida Supreme Court and the jurist that I clerked for from 1985-87 when I graduated law school.

Q & A with Bob Bivins

He was down to earth and pragmatic and while he had strong personal convictions, he instilled in me the value of precedent. Under him, I came to understand how the law could progress without turning precedent on its head and leaving uncertainty and chaos in its wake. Although a lot of folks were cautious around Justice McDonald as he could sometimes come off as intimidating, he took me under his wing and became a great friend and mentor.

Bob Rasmussen, the managing partner and my supervising partner in the corporate and security department of the first private firm I worked for from 1987 to 1998, was my other mentor. He was demanding, but had a way of instilling enthusiasm and loyalty and making you strive to be the best lawyer you could be in all endeavors. I always looked at it as tough love. More than anyone else Bob made me the lawyer I am today. Although I left the firm for another opportunity after working with him for about 11 years, we remain great friends to this day.

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

A: Two, both from Bob Rasmussen, regarding the practice of law:

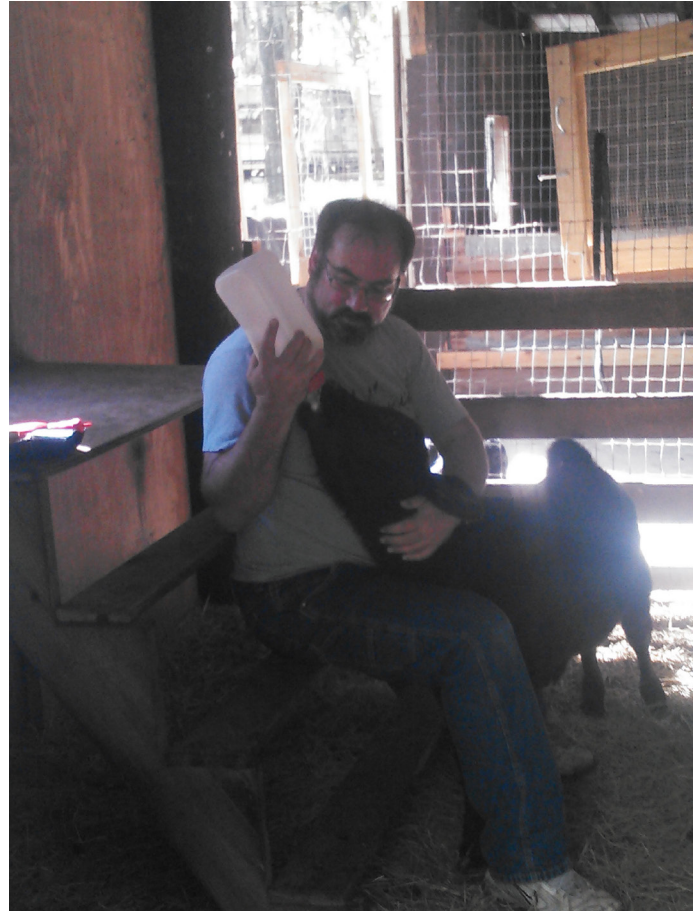
- (1) In negotiations, if you don't ask, you don't get.
- (2) When talking to clients who want to jump feet first into a fight with another party over principle, always remind them that principle is great until they get their first legal bill.

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

A: Speak Spanish. As noted above, since I was a baby, my mother was convinced I would be an attorney. Because many legal terms arose from Latin phrases, she made sure I took two years of Latin in high school. I excelled in Latin and still remember some phrases to this day. In hindsight, it would have been more helpful given the demographic changes in the Tampa Bay Area to have spent those two years learning Spanish fluently.

Q: What is your proudest career achievement?

A: During my tour of duty as an attorney, even before making partner at my first firm, I have had the distinct privilege of training and mentoring a number of outstanding young attorneys. Some of them have gone on to lead some of the best and most prestigious law firms in the Tampa area. Of all of them, though, serving as mentor to my current partners, John Hemenway and Eric Cruz since their graduation from law school has indeed been my highest honor. They are truly the very best of our profession, and the future of our firm.



At his ranch near Tampa, Bivins nurses a calf named Audra. "Her mom wasn't able to nurse her, so I took over the role and kept her in the barn for about a week until she learned to come to me when I was holding the bottle," said Bivins.

Q: What other career path might you have chosen?

A: Most likely banking. My grandfather was in that industry before the Great Depression and I was on that path prior to making the decision on going to law school. I also might have decided to pursue a career in journalism instead though. I was an investigative reporter for a while when I was in college and found that pretty exciting.

Q: What is your most treasured material possession?

A: Several pieces of furniture in my home were inherited from my grandparents and refinished by my mom and me after they died. Those and my family pictures are without a doubt my most treasured material possessions.

Q: What is your happiest childhood memory?

A: Our family dog, a black lab named Smokey, was not only a loving family member, but she had a job as my part-time babysitter. From the time I was old enough to get around on

Q & A with Bob Bivins

my own, my parents wanted me outside in the fresh air as much as possible, but they both worked full time and couldn't afford a daytime babysitter. Until I was probably 8, when I was outside Smokey was always there by my side. She would listen for the door and then come from her doghouse to join me when she heard me come outside. When I was very little, I had a bad habit of wandering off property and into our street. Whenever I tried to do that though, Smokey would jaunt in front of me and push me back onto the grass with her nose. She was always gentle, but ever vigilant and determined to do the job of keeping me safe. Eventually, we would roll around and play in the grass until I forgot about my desire to wander. Not sure whether and how mom got that instruction across to her, but Smokey was truly amazing. I miss her to this day.

Q: What is your favorite movie and book?

A: Movie: I tend to love science fiction movies, and "Jurassic World" is probably my favorite.

Book: "Atlas Shrugged" by Ayn Rand

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

A: Alaska for sure. The wildlife and how they interact with each other and with people were unforgettable.

Q: What are your favorite leisure time pursuits?

A: Working on my ranch, quality time with my dogs, and travel to the mountains.

Q: What is your favorite famous or inspirational quote?

A: A partial quote from President Reagan's address to the nation after the Challenger explosion, the latter portion of which I have used at more than one friend's eulogy:

"We will never forget them, nor the last time we saw them, this morning, as they prepared for their journey and waved goodbye and slipped the surly bonds of Earth to touch the face of God."

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

A: Ronald Reagan, Elon Musk, and Britany Spears. Oh, the fascinating questions to be asked and conversations that might arise.



Bivins finds that he develops a special bond with his animals, including calves Baxter and Cocoa.

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

A: Traveling to Norway to see the Northern Lights. Touring Bavaria, hopefully during Oktoberfest. Finally getting this list of answers to Robin Lewis!