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## Family life: Legal couples often must face the limelight



February 01, 2011

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By [Laura Fletcher](#)

Pursuing the law at a high level often leads to the kinds of media exposure that can end a stressful day on a sour note or cause panic over the proper way to counteract a negative image. How do lawyers, judges and politicians cope with these realities in their personal lives? How do their spouses cope? And what happens when both husband and wife are navigating the perils- and joys- of the limelight?

James R. Thompson, Illinois governor for 14 years, U.S. attorney before that and now the senior chairman of Winston & Strawn, has spent decades in the public eye and doesn't seem to mind it.

The loss of privacy that came with Thompson's leadership roles was to be expected and is entirely proper, up to a point, he said.

"[The public] want to know you're the kind of person that they trust," Thompson said.

"But you'd come home sometimes and you'd be mad at whatever some news story said," Thompson said. "You knew that you weren't going to get in a fight with the newspaper about it. Don't ever get in a fight with somebody who buys ink by the barrel. So you'd say, 'Tomorrow, I'll make an attempt to correct this impression.'"

Those attempts, he noted, usually failed, but he learned over time that the media ultimately forgets the unflattering portrayals it dispenses. Still, Thompson viewed the public uproar that surrounded his wife's interest in a federal judicial seat as one of the most unfair moments of his governorship.

"She was going to a position that was entirely different in the federal system," he said. "I always thought at the time and think even more strongly today that it was very hurtful and ignorant. Today you see a lot of gubernatorial-judge combos in which either the man or the woman are governors. People aren't as prejudiced now as they were then. People are much more open-minded and more protective of people's rights to practice their profession."

As Illinois' first lady for 14 years, Jayne Carr Thompson received more than her fair share of public scrutiny, with the press running stories on every aspect of her life, from her ground-breaking career as the first woman in the state's Criminal Justice Division to her diet. And, while she didn't thrive on public attention the way her husband did, she learned to adapt and even found her life as First Lady of Illinois to be a broadening experience.

"One of the benefits was that I got to go to parts of the state of Illinois I might not have otherwise visited. I got to meet some wonderful people who are still personal friends," she said. "Early on in Jim's governorship I was asked to go to Cairo, a small town, not well-to-do, and I was asked to open the state's first domestic violence shelter, and I met some really lovely people, some of whom remain personal friends."

As for the former governor, well, public attention is just fine. "I get stopped all the time," Thompson said. "Every public encounter I've had in the past 19 years has been friendly."

What do people say to him? "Gee, I wish you were running again." "Thanks for saving the White Sox." This, according to Thompson, from cab drivers, city workers driving by in trucks and people of all stations in life, regardless of race or class.

His favorite compliment: "I wish you would run for president."

### **'Always some conflict'**

Edward Burke, the 14th Ward alderman since 1969, has received more than his share of media attention over a turbulent public career, much of it negative.

"If anyone told you it wasn't stressful, they'd be lying," he said. "Chicago journalism being what it is, there seems to be an attitude that the press needs to be constantly stoked and that there's always some imagined impropriety or conflict."

Burke said he drew from Cardinal Joseph Bernardin's experience of dealing with accusations of misconduct as his inspiration for responding to attacks. "If you're convinced in your own mind that what you have done was legal and ethical, then you need not worry what somebody else says."

Burke's wife, Illinois Supreme Court Justice Anne M. Burke, hasn't had as difficult a time with the press as her husband has. "The only time that it's ever troublesome," she said, "and I don't let it bother me, I don't lose any sleep over it - is when people say, 'You only got where you got because of your husband.' "

Even though, she said, it's true, it's not in the way that some people might imply. "I never would have gone to college, I never would have gone to law school but for him," she said. "But that's a good thing, to have someone encourage you to do something."

Yet the alderman described his reasons for encouraging his wife to finish her bachelor's degree and embark on a law career as primarily selfish. The Burkes had four children who were dependent on Burke's law practice and his work for the city at the time. "I remember saying to her, 'It's not like I own a widget factory. If I get hit by a bus tomorrow morning, unless you have a law license, that practice is gone.' "

According to Justice Burke, he enticed her to the law by pointing out the greater power it would give her in advocating for disabled children, which she had done in one form or another ever since founding the Special Olympics with Eunice Kennedy Shriver in 1968.

Burke graduated from Chicago-Kent College of Law in 1983 at age 39. And her career that followed, which included a seat on the Court of Claims, the Illinois Appellate Court, a role as Special Counsel to the Governor for Child Welfare Services and a two-year stint as the interim chairwoman of the National Review Board for the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, evolved naturally out of her previous work with children, she said.

When asked if he feels that men who encourage and support successful women are given enough credit, Edward Burke balked: "I don't think husbands who support their wives or encourage their careers are looking for any approval or approbation from society."

### **Political tangle**

Mary Seminara-Schostok, a justice on the 2nd District Appellate Court, found that her husband's support - far from receiving credit from society - created a great deal of controversy when she ran for the appellate court.

Seminara-Schostok, who was a circuit court judge before joining the appellate court, is a Republican and her husband, Michael Schostok, name partner in the plaintiff personal-injury firm of Salvi, Schostok & Pritchard, is a well-known Democrat.

"The fact that my husband is a Democrat and the fact that my husband is a trial lawyer was brought up constantly by people questioning my commitment to the Republican Party and questioning my values," Seminara-Schostok said.

"And, you know, it was somewhat offensive to me, because I thought, 'Don't I have my own mind? Didn't I make it this far in my career - not by myself, because Michael certainly was behind me every step of the way?' But, it's just almost insulting to me that a woman can't just be one thing and her husband be something else."

In October 2009, a mass e-mail was sent by an affiliate of the Civil Justice League seeking financial support for Seminara-Schostok's opponent, describing the judge as the wife of a "multimillion-dollar trial lawyer." And in January 2010, another mass e-mail was sent, this time by an anonymous party, urging voters to "do a background check," on "Mary Schostok and her multimillionaire Personal Injury Lawyer husband Michael Schostok," claiming that "Democrats are running stealth candidates posing as Republicans."

According to Schostok, the advertisements against his wife were funded by the same group that produced attack ads against Illinois Supreme Court Chief Justice Thomas L. Kilbride in the most recent judicial election.

"I like to think that it's hard to justify why you would come after a person like me who has been a good judge," said Seminara-Schostok, who noted that her husband found his first job as a personal-injury lawyer through a Young Republicans group that they both attended. "They had nothing else against me."

Her husband agreed. "It was not because of any ruling she made, or any personal failings, or anything like that. It was solely because of me."

### **Having it all**

You could say that Tom Abendroth and Terri Mascherin have it all. Both have been practicing law at their firms for 26 years - Abendroth at Schiff Hardin and Mascherin at Jenner & Block, they have their children and now Mascherin is president of the Chicago Bar Association. Rightly so, the couple said they feel that they have achieved a satisfying work-life balance.

But having it all, Mascherin said, is "really a matter of having what you want to have. I don't really want 'it' all. But I have what I want and that's what's important to me."

But despite their mutual success, Abendroth said he can tell that attitudes toward dual careers in the legal profession have not progressed very far by the number of people who, when he tells them that his wife is a lawyer, ask, "Oh, and is she working full time?"

On the other hand, Abendroth noted that the importance of husbands who value and respect their wives' careers could be held up as more of an ideal in the legal profession.

Abendroth, who has a cohort of peers at Schiff Hardin with highly successful wives, said a double standard can materialize when men have to take time off work to compensate for a wife who is out of town. Also, men like him are still in the minority.

"Our society is always evolving," he said, "and over the last 30 years, women in the workforce have every year become a bigger and bigger percentage of the workforce, so it's a whole evolving process and I don't know that anybody has taken the time to highlight a male's role in how supportive he is in bolstering his wife's career or whether or not he's willing to take a back seat to his wife's career and let her be the primary breadwinner.

"I'm sure that happens all the time, but whether or not that really is highlighted, I haven't seen it."

### **A supportive spouse**

It may not be highlighted, but it's certainly the case that for Patricia Brown Holmes and her husband, Michael Holmes, giving equal importance to their careers has been a struggle at times.

Patricia, a partner at Schiff Hardin, was an associate judge in Cook County for eight years and an assistant U.S. attorney before joining Schiff Hardin in 2005. Michael, an All-Big Ten running back at the University of Illinois, started as an urban planner for the city, directing various redevelopment projects.

As Michael's work for the city took him into the public school system and Patricia became more involved with juvenile justice as a juvenile court judge, the couple's work would often overlap: Michael would teach her street slang and give her tips on reaching the troubled young people who came into her court, while Patricia would use her knowledge of assistance programs to recommend options for Michael's students. The family reached out to so many children in one form or another that Patricia liked to joke that she had 400 sons.

The Holmes family made a major sacrifice in 2008, when Michael left a six-figure job with the city of Chicago as the director of three housing programs to take a position as vice president, director of admissions and head football coach at Leo Catholic High School.

"I thought, 'Are you serious?'" Patricia said. "'Really?' But you know, it was one of the best things ever."

"I highly and truly respect what she does and what she's been doing," Michael said. "I help in any way I can, I try to aid her in what she's doing in her career and I think she respects my decision, what I'm doing, because I could have stayed in city government. I did that for a long time, but she knew my desire to come back and work in the community and help out in the school. The school is part of the community, so this is just a vehicle to help the young men in the community and in the city."

Still, with three children of their own, the couple's journey has not been without its work-life stresses.

"If you're trying to balance like this," Patricia said, holding up two hands at equal level, "you're going to fail. Balance is this." She moved her hands up and down. "It's a continuum. It is constantly moving. Sometimes you do get there, but then it's going to go here."

Paula Hudson Holderman, who was recently elected third vice president of the Illinois State Bar Association and serves as Winston & Strawn's chief attorney development officer, said her husband, Chief Judge James Holderman of the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Illinois, has been a mentor to her.

She also confessed that she occasionally feels overshadowed by his status.

"I do everything I can to make her not feel that way," said Judge Holderman, who holds strong views about encouraging and fostering the careers of women in the law that date back to his childhood with four sisters. "When I go to the Illinois State Bar, I have a name tag that says 'Paula Holderman's Spouse.'"

Of course, the amount of "psychic income" one spouse earns in relation to the other may not always be equal. Paula mentioned one time when she knew the scales had tipped in her favor. In 2009, she was invited to a holiday reception at the White House, while the judge was not. James encouraged her to attend and she ended up taking 70 pictures within two hours and becoming the topic of a *Chicago Daily Law Bulletin* front-page story just as she was beginning her campaign for Illinois State Bar president.

The attention was, she admitted, "quite random but totally fun."

## Staying home

Personal-injury lawyer Bob Clifford married Joan Clifford while in law school and the two have never known life without Bob's break-neck schedule. Clifford, according to his wife, works "about 20 hours a day."

"The biggest challenge was when Bob was in law school and first starting out," Joan said. "We were newlyweds and Bob was attending DePaul law school full time. He also was working full time for a portion of law school so, of course, it meant that we rarely were able to spend time together."

"Joan makes it work because she believes in me," Bob said. "She is as committed to helping the victims of negligence and wrongful conduct as I am."

She understands that these people need representation, they need legal help, and she understands that doesn't come with a 9-5 job.

"The fact is that I think that in the service industry, whether it's practicing law, delivering medicine, representing on a consulting basis, I think that any service job means that you're available to people 24/7," Bob said.

The two have built a happy marriage based on a division of labor that has allowed him to devote himself to his career.

"Over the years while I was building my practice, Joan was willing to make many sacrifices," Bob said. "In particular, when I am on trial, she tries to support me in her own quiet way."

"While our two daughters were growing up, we always made time for family time. Joan was good about that. We took vacations. We had dinner together. Joan still makes sure that that happens."

"I had to learn to have my own interests and occupy my time with things fulfilling to me," Joan said. "We have been married 40 years now and over the years, we have learned how to build our relationship on our strengths. We bring out the best in each other so each of us can enjoy life as individuals, as a couple and as a family with our two daughters as well as our extended family."

After their children left home, Joan's habit of accompanying her husband on business trips grew into a travel business that she ran for 13 years.

So, should female lawyers aspiring to Clifford's level of success seek out stay-at-home husbands?

"No," Bob said. "I think you got to pick a partner 'cause you love 'em, you know, worry about that other stuff and how your life evolves from there."

Joan, who currently is a vice president of the Goodman Theatre's board of trustees, agreed.

"Whatever it is," she said, "you have to make it work."

<http://www.chicagolawyer magazine.com/Archives/2011/02/Family-life.aspx>