

Q & A > department

Tina B. Solis

Age: 38

Family: She is married to Eric Solis.

Education: She received her undergraduate degree from the University of Iowa in 1994 and her law degree from the University of Iowa Law School in 1997.

Profession: A partner at Ungaretti & Harris, she concentrates her practice on commercial litigation. She has experience in a wide array of business disputes, including contract actions, law firm dissolutions, shareholder remedies, commercial fraud, trade secret litigation, unfair competition, business torts and employment defense.

1. Why did you become a lawyer?

My father had a small business, and a good friend of his was his business attorney. I had very positive experiences with Walter and actually worked for him a summer when I was in college and decided that's really what I wanted to do. I guess I knew for a very long time what I wanted to do. Then the second year of law school I was going down the path of becoming a transactional attorney and got selected to work in my law school's clinic. I got inside a courtroom and did a 180-degree shift. It was the best experience I'd ever had.

2. What is your last case or matter that you can discuss, and what did it entail?

The last big case involved a multimillion-dollar breach of contract dispute between the general contractor that I represented and a subcontractor, and it was involving the construction of a conveyor system in an automobile manufacturing facility. We were able, after conducting phase one of the bench trial

in front of Judge [Robert W.] Gettleman, to resolve it without finishing the case. It was a very good result for my client, and I think they were very happy with the representation, and it really allowed the firm to solidify its relationship with the client. And it was also probably for me a great experience because I was lead counsel on it. It was one of those cases I got to take from very early on through the finish and construct the theory and analysis.

3. If you could have lunch with anyone, living or dead, who would it be and why?

John F. Kennedy and Robert Kennedy.

Those two faced a number of very high-stakes negotiations during the president's tenure and part of being a lawyer is having great negotiating skills. It is one of the essences of being a great lawyer, whether it's being a litigator or transactional attorney. I would love to question them about some of their reactions in those situations to find out how that transpired.

4. What is your favorite movie, book, play or television show about lawyers, and why?

The book is easy and that's "The Brethren," which was assigned reading prior to starting law school, but it turned out to be one of my favorite books. It involves sort of a summary of the Warren court and its key decisions in the late '60s and early '70s, which was a very volatile period.

My favorite movie is "Erin Brockovich." It's a funny movie, but it takes a very serious tone in the content it's dealing with. The reason I like it is because so many different people in that movie underestimated or stereotyped her and she used that to her advantage. Some of the things she did in that movie, and the skills that she used to glean information from people could teach us all a lesson.

5. What advice do you have for new lawyers?

First and foremost, work hard, which sounds like a cliché, but you need to put in the hours and develop the skills to be a good lawyer. Second, try to find a mentor. I've been very fortunate in my career to have a couple of excellent mentors who to this day I still learn things from. I think it's very important for young attorneys to find someone and form that relationship because you will not only learn a skill set and receive the type of learning skills that you will need to be successful, but

it's also important to learn about the business of practicing law. That sort of leads into the third thing that I think is important for young lawyers, which is start your networking now. Especially in this economic environment I think it becomes even more important. There is no time like the present. ...

6. If you didn't become a lawyer, what career would you have chosen?

I would have become a veterinarian. I have a strong love of animals, and any of my colleagues here know I have four dogs. Animals are sort of a passion for me on the charity side, and I clearly would have become a vet.

7. What's your favorite childhood vacation?

My favorite childhood vacation was the annual trip that we took to Canada and camped for a week and did boating and fishing and we would bring our bicycles along. We always went with several other families who had kids that were my age and it was just always a great experience. It was just being in the outdoors, and I like the outdoors. ...

8. What's your favorite Chicago restaurant?

I would probably say for Italian there is a little place, Mart Anthony's, that used to be in the West Loop that is now over on Hubbard. And then for Mexican, which is also one of my favorites, I would say Caoba on Damen, which is also just another small, neighborhood place, but again I tend to gravitate to the smaller neighborhood places that not everyone knows about because I would actually like to hear the person I am having lunch or dinner with.

9. What is the strangest experience you've had as a lawyer?

The strangest thing that's ever happened to me is, I was involved in a case that was ongoing at the time of the 9/11 attacks, and our client's document warehouse was destroyed. It was in the basement of one of the Towers. I had to, when faced with a motion to compel as to why documents had not been produced, had to advise the district court judge that the reason they had not been produced was not because we were withholding anything but in fact because our entire warehouse had been destroyed in the attacks. The judge was very gracious and understanding in that situation. ■

By Olivia Clarke

