

GREATER PHOENIX EDITION | SEPTEMBER 2010

# ATTORNEY AT LAW

MAGAZINE

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By Paula Hubbs Cohen

# Bill Bishop

**Some people are born lucky, some people make their own luck.**

*Bill Bishop is one of the latter.*

**A**fter receiving his undergraduate degree in 1984 from Willamette University in Salem, Oregon, he worked at various jobs for a while, then decided to pursue graduate-level education.

“I couldn’t decide between going to law school or getting my MBA, so I decided to flip a coin,” he says with a slight smile. “I was leaning toward law school, and told myself if it was tails, I’d go to law school, but if it was heads, I’d get my MBA.”

*As luck would have it, heads it was. – Oops.*

Lucky for those in need of an expert family-law attorney, Bishop talked himself out of an MBA and into law school.

## *Competitive Drive Instilled Early*

An Oregon native, Bishop spent his youth in the small town of Ontario adjacent to the Snake River on the eastern border between Oregon and Idaho. His childhood was focused on sports, primarily wrestling, thanks to a father who was not only a teacher, but also a football and wrestling coach for the local high school.

“My father pushed my brother and I very hard in both sports and academics, and I’m sure this resulted in a



L to R: Kristen Martin, Bill Bishop, Angela Peacock, and Fred Ruotolo

good part of my competitive drive in the practice of law,” says Bishop. “During elementary and high school, my vacations generally involved cutting weight and traveling to wrestling tournaments. It wasn’t always fun, but it did teach me about hard work and rewards.”

Bishop says that his father made it very clear that he and his brother were going to college “whether we liked it or not,” and that he and Bishop’s mother could not afford to pay for it. “Before we were even old enough to understand what an academic or athletic scholarship was, he was very emphatic that we needed to obtain one when we graduated from high school, and I was fortunate to obtain several.”

As a young teenager, Bishop worked during summers and holiday breaks doing some pretty backbreaking tasks, including peeling logs, hauling railroad ties, shingling roofs and hoeing onions. “Although I resented it at the time, looking back, I have to give my father credit where credit is due. He grew up on a ranch, and wanted to make sure we knew how difficult work was and that a post-high school education was key to our future success,” recalls Bishop. “He was always a very honest and hard-working person and I have the utmost respect for him. I have no doubt that his demands for perfection and hard work had a tremendous impact on my life.”

### *Finding His Passion in Family Law*

After the life-changing, post-undergrad coin toss, Bishop moved to Arizona, graduating from ASU School of Law in 1989. “I then worked for several years as an associate attorney practicing civil litigation for large- and mid-sized

law firms,” he says. “Over time, I found my passion was in family law. It can be a tough gig because a successful family law attorney needs to constantly focus their clients on the big picture. The clients frequently feel betrayed by their spouse, and often, their economic welfare is hanging by a thread.”

This dynamic attorney explains that, despite its inherent difficulties, what drew him to family law is the ability to work with people regarding issues that impact their lives on a daily basis. “Many attorneys find family law distasteful, but I find just the opposite,” he says. “This area of law is as technical as any out there, including issues involving the tax code, business valuations, income analysis and apportionment issues involving sole and separate versus community property. It can be very challenging.”

### *How so?*

“Sometimes, we’re given just an hour to conduct a trial, and it is rare that more than a day is provided,” says Bishop, who is a Certified Family Law Specialist. “Conversely, during my civil days, I once had three weeks to conduct a trial regarding a dispute over \$150,000. Attorneys in jury trials have the luxury of developing their cases, with ample time for examination, presenting documentary evidence and making closing arguments. This is not always the case in family law.”

Bishop portrays a typical family law courtroom scene as taking place over perhaps three to six hours. “And this can be for a case that potentially involves six-figure issues, numerous witnesses, child support disputes, spousal



Angela Peacock



Fred Ruotolo



Kristen Martin

maintenance and competing expert opinions regarding custody and complex financial issues,” he says. “It requires many extra hours of work to ensure you have an excellent joint pretrial statement and that you have polished your trial presentation so you can fit your case in the time allotted. He notes that it can be quite unnerving “when you are scorching through your examination while the judge is providing ‘gentle’ reminders that you have only two minutes left and you still have three major issues you need to address.”

Bishop remarks that he has a great deal of respect for family law judges, “especially those who voluntarily choose to stay on the family law bench after years of what must seem like trench warfare. On occasion, I’ve served as a judge pro-tem, and I have rarely worked so hard in such a short amount of time.”

### *Creating His Own Firm*

In 1996, Bishop decided to go out on his own and subsequently began his career as a solo practitioner.

“Besides my children, one of the things I am most proud of is our law firm. I have built the firm from the ground up and am surrounded by some very incredible people,” says Bishop. “My partner, Kristen Martin, has been with me since she graduated from law school in 2000; she was the first attorney I hired. I constantly receive feedback from other attorneys regarding how great of an attorney she is and how enjoyable she is to work with.”

Bishop describes Angela Peacock as “a very hard worker, detail oriented and extremely thorough.” He adds that “Fred Ruotolo is not only an awesome attorney, but as any family law attorney in town will tell you, he is the ultimate gentleman.”

At one point, the firm had grown to six attorneys, but Bishop says that four lawyers seems to be their ‘sweet spot’. “Four seems to be a perfect size because it allows me to concentrate on my cases as opposed to being a business manager,” he says. “As far as the success of our firm, I think it comes down to providing excellent service, good client communications, high levels of professionalism and most importantly, a total commitment to each client.”

### *And finally...*

Bishop believes he and his partners are very accomplished at choosing the right battles as well as knowing when to go to trial and when to settle.

Or as he puts it: “As Kenny Rogers sang, you have to know when to hold ‘em and know when to fold ‘em.”

*In other words, making your own luck.*

## At a Glance

### Areas of Practice

- Family Law
- Child Support
- Custody and Visitation
- Divorce

### Certifications, Professional Associations and Recognitions

- Certified Family Law Specialist
- Served as Chairperson, Maricopa County Bar Association Family Law Section
- AV Rated, Martindale-Hubbell Registrar of Preeminent Lawyers

### Bar Admissions

- Arizona, 1990
- U.S. District Court
- Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals

### Education

- B.S., Political Science and Psychology; Willamette University; Salem, Oregon; 1984
- J.D., Arizona State University College of Law; Tempe, Arizona; 1989

### Family

- Two daughters: “Kasia is 14 and is an incredible snow-skiier; I plan to take her helicopter-skiing before I get too old to keep up with her. Beau is only 4 and is absolutely hilarious; I love her constant laughter.”

### Contact info

William D. Bishop

Founder and Managing Partner

Bishop & Martin Law Office, P.C.

7210 North 16th Street

Phoenix, Arizona 85020

Phone: (602) 749-8500

Fax: (602) 749-8502

Email: [Bill@BishopLawOffice.com](mailto:Bill@BishopLawOffice.com)

Website: [www.bishoplawoffice.com](http://www.bishoplawoffice.com)

Tempe Office:

8747 South Priest Drive, Suite 102

Tempe, Arizona 85284

Phone: (602) 749-8500