

JAY FRANK

Loving Job He Finds 'a Cool Thing to Do'

by **Olivia Clarke**

At age 70, Jay Frank gets up each morning at 4:30 a.m. so he can enjoy his daily five-mile run.

"I've been doing it forever," says Frank, who specializes in family law. "I find that it's a great way to start the day. Your mind is clear and you're sharp."

Frank works at **Aronberg, Goldgehn, Davis & Garmisa** as a senior matrimonial attorney. A member of the American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers, he represents clients dealing with a variety of family law matters related to divorce, premarital agreements, property distributions, and support, custody, and visitation issues.

"I think I deal with some of the most important problems that anyone can face," Frank says. "In a family law case, everything that counts in your life is on the table, everything—your house, your kids, your retirement plan, your Corvette. It's a life-changing event for most people going through that."

Frank was born in Chicago. He and his family moved to Lansing, Mich., when his father, a store manager for a Walgreen's, got transferred. After about eight years, the family returned to Chicago.

He attended the University of Illinois, first on the Navy Pier campus and then in Champaign, where he also attended law school.

He says he chose law school as a default option because his political science major and anthropology and philosophy split-minor didn't provide him with better options. But the decision turned out to be the right one.

"I enjoyed law school. I liked the problem-solving aspect," he says. "I liked the theory. Some of the law schools taught black-letter law. The University of Illinois goes about it a different way and gives you the theories behind why something happened and allows you to figure out exactly what the answer should be."

After graduating law school he faced two career options—taking over a family friend's Lansing, Mich., practice or working in Chicago for Aaron, Schimberg & Hess, a 25-person general practice law firm.

He chose the Chicago option and worked there for about six years. He left and formed his own partnership—Eisner, Miller & Frank—with two law school classmates. The firm brought in a fourth law school classmate and a couple

years after that, Frank and that friend formed their own firm, Frank & Melamed. That firm grew and merged with another firm in 1990.

"In the late '90s we needed lawyers, but we had trouble finding good lawyers because we could not afford to pay what the big firms paid," he says. "We needed good talent. Ultimately that firm ended and several of the lawyers from that firm came to this firm. That would have been 1998."

Fair Deal Always the Goal

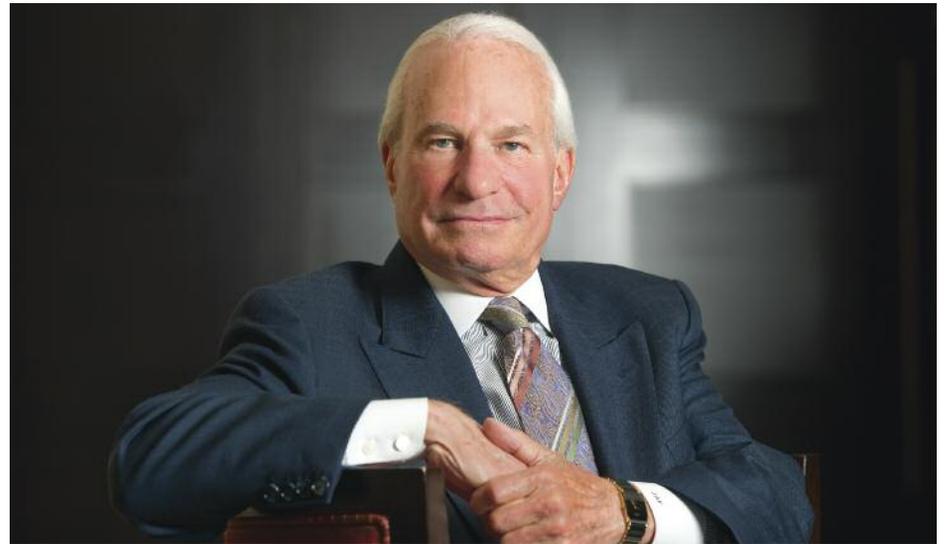
For the first 10 to 15 years of his career he worked as a commercial litigator. He handled a little family law work on the side. That aspect of his practice grew and he eventually

when the couple was married.

"You have to determine what assets are going to benefit your client and how you move the pieces of the case around so your client gets a fair share of those assets," he says.

James H. Feldman, head of the family law practice at Jenner & Block LLP, says he's known Frank since law school when they sat next to each other in classes arranged alphabetically. He says Frank worked hard and excelled at school. They also know each other in the family law practice world, Feldman says.

"He's an intense and formidable litigator who can handle the tough cases," Feldman says. "He fights hard for his clients and as an opponent you know he will always be on top



switched to family law work full-time.

"The toughest issue to deal with would be issues regarding the children," Frank says. "You are talking about custody. Who is going to have the say and who is going to have the control over what happens to the kids and how often will the parent visit with the child and over what period of time? I prefer the economic issues over these issues because these issues are really difficult. Sometimes the kids get caught in the middle and they're the losers and sometimes the parents can't see that."

In addition to child custody and support issues, he also regularly handles how to separate a family business and the expenses and profits associated with that business

of the facts and the law."

Donald C. Schiller, senior partner at Schiller, DuCanto & Fleck LLP, says he's known Frank professionally for about 20 years. He describes him as an excellent lawyer who exemplifies civility in the practice. He understands the difference between disagreeing and acting disagreeable.

"I see him as a solid advocate for his client's cause," Schiller says. "I also think he exercises professional judgment in filtering out what a client may want to have and what a client may not be entitled to, and seeks out their more soundly based requests and desires. It is very important that lawyers not be mouthpieces for their clients. They don't need cheerleaders. He practices professionally and works with his

clients to make sure they have reasonable expectations.”

Frank’s practice area has changed in terms of the quality of the lawyers and judges working within it. Both groups have become much more sophisticated. The practice has also become more intellectual, more difficult, and more demanding.

“I think 20 or 25 years ago a lawyer would try a divorce case every once in a while,” he says. “If you try that now you could be in real trouble because there are some technicalities and meaty issues that you might not even see if you don’t do this work on a regular basis.”

In addition to his daily runs, he also makes a practice of working in the office half a day each Saturday. During the week he finds himself in court regularly, working with his clients and answering phone messages and e-mails.

His Saturday workday allows him to catch up and get ready for the weekday grind.

When he started as a lawyer he considered himself very hands-on, someone who enjoyed dealing with every aspect of a matter. But as his practice grew, he says he learned that he could no longer practice that way.

Today, he works with two other partners and two associates in the firm’s five-lawyer practice area. He says he knows he must trust in his colleagues as they work together as a team on many matters.

“I’m still very, very close to every case,” he says. “But I probably don’t touch every piece of paper that comes in. That is what changed over time.

“The family law practice is interesting because there are different levels to the practice. There are the practical aspects of helping the client through areas on sometimes a day-to-day basis. ...Part of the job is to also help the client work through the process. It’s a very personal practice.”

Forming Bonds That Last

“You really sort of bond with the client and maybe that’s something that shouldn’t happen, but it does,” Frank says. “I don’t know how you can avoid that. When the case is over, in many situations you form relationships that are around for a long, long time.”

He’s also willing to seek outside assistance when it’s needed. In 1990, he helped create the Legal Netlink Alliance, a confederation of 110 law firms throughout the United States, Europe, and other areas of the world that work together on matters when those matters occur in one of those areas.

“I wanted some lawyers I could count on and use them as referral sources when I needed

someone to help me in Indiana or Michigan,” he says. “If I have an issue on a case in Paris, I can pick up the phone and talk to the guy in Paris that I know and he will be on the case in five minutes. It’s an incredible resource.”

Bonds of a more personal nature are important to Frank, too, though it took some effort to form his most important and permanent one. After college, Frank’s dentist fixed him up with his daughter. When she answered the door at the start of the date, Frank also met the girl’s roommate. While he went out with the dentist’s daughter, he discovered that he actually liked the roommate more.

“It took a better part of a year before she would go out with me,” he jokes. “We went out for pizza in September and we were engaged in October and married the following February. We’ve been married 40 years.”

He and his wife, Gale, a retired administrative aide, have two children. Their daughter, Lauren Noll, is a lawyer and she and her husband have three children. Their son, Jordy, is also an attorney.

Frank and his wife enjoy traveling together, where he’ll often lace up his running shoes to do his regular run—regardless of the country. He also runs the Chicago Marathon each year.

But he says he really enjoys working and maintaining his practice.

“It’s more than a job,” he says. “It’s not a 9 to 5 situation. It’s a cool thing to do. It’s a hell of a lot of fun. Family is always No. 1, no matter what happens. But the job should come pretty close to that. You’ve got to care about getting better at what you do. You’ve got to care about all the developments. It’s part of who I am.” ■