

LARRY KANE

Finding Solutions, for Divorce Clients Not ‘Whipping Up Storms’

by Amanda Robert

Where some people might sound corny, Larry R. Kane comes across as straightforward and genuine when he admits his concern as a family lawyer is to make sure that divorced parents are civil enough to participate in their children’s weddings.

In Kane’s 46 years of practice, he witnessed too many cases where parents stopped speaking to each other. He faces that

challenge by figuring out how to accomplish as many of his client’s reasonable goals as he can while allowing the other side to achieve some of its goals.

chance to lead better lives than the ones they left behind, he says.

“I’m pretty lucky, because for the most part, I attract clients who want to be more fair because they know my general beliefs,” Kane says. “Whoever is referring clients to me knows I don’t believe in a ‘scorched earth policy,’ that I want to allow them to walk [their children] down the aisle together.”

two people who are fighting to think about their children and their future as they work to resolve their disputes.

“I always concern myself, and I know that Larry does the same, with how they get along when the case is over,” he says. “You try not to get overly aggressive, and you have to temper your representation of the client with the idea that somewhere along the line, these are



Kane, 70, a partner at **Davis Friedman**, learned as a young lawyer that in divorce cases, an agreement becomes a good agreement if both sides walk away a little unhappy. That means lawyers on each side achieved a fair result and gave their clients a

challenge by figuring out how to accomplish as many of his client’s reasonable goals as he can while allowing the other side to achieve some of its goals.

Miles N. Beermann, a founding partner of Beermann Swerdlove LLP, met Kane more than 40 years ago when they served as members of the Chicago Bar Association Civil Practice Committee. They each practiced something other than family law, so they became friends before they became family lawyers who opposed each other in the courtroom.

people who are not going to have their lawyers at their side, and they’ll have to get along for the benefit of their children.”

Sandra Murphy, a retired partner of McDermott, Will & Emery LLP, met Kane when he became her opposing counsel in a divorce case in 1978. Like Beermann, she commends him for his ability to come to the aid of his clients and focus on positive resolutions instead of “whipping up the storm.”

“The counselor aspect of helping a client negotiate through a very difficult process is a standout thing for him,” Murphy says. “Some people make it much harder or more acrimonious than it needs to be. But that doesn’t mean he isn’t a very worthy opponent—he is tough.”

Family Ties

Born in August 1940, Kane grew up as a “dining-room child” in Rogers Park. His father managed a grocery store, while his mother stayed at home, and they both treated him like the “perennial spoiled child, or as much as my parents could afford to spoil me.”

“I never knew we didn’t have any money, which is, I guess, a good thing,” Kane says.

He attended Chicago Public Schools, finishing high school as a mid-year graduate in 1958. Within a week, he hopped on an Illinois Central train headed for Champaign and started college at the University of Illinois. He studied accounting and considered a business career, but somewhere along the line, he decided he would make a terrible businessman.

“There were no lawyers in the family, but I guess I decided it sounded OK,” he says. “Jewish boys had to be doctors, lawyers or CPAs, and I hated the sight of blood, so what else was I going to do?”

Kane attended DePaul University College of Law since the school catered to students who needed to work. He took morning classes and clerked for several small firms until he graduated in 1965.

He joined Ruttenberg & Ruttenberg, a general practice firm where he worked for one year as a law student and two years as a lawyer. He handled mostly litigation, corporate and real estate matters for firm founders and brothers, Marvin and David. He calls them his early mentors.

“Marvin taught me how to think like a lawyer, and David taught me the business side of being a lawyer and what you have to do to get business,” Kane says.

Kane left Ruttenberg & Ruttenberg to help open Wexler, Kane & Rosenzweig in 1967. He practiced mostly general litigation, and after seven years, he left the firm to open his own office.

“Some friends had a hallway that extended past the last door in their office by 10 feet, and they built a door in the hall so I had an office,” he says. “I had a desk and a chair for me, and a chair for one client who could sit in the office. It’s hard to believe, but I did that for nine months.”

Kane became of counsel to Mann, Cogan,

Sklar & Lerman in 1974. By then, he decided he could no longer practice in several areas. He chose to become a family lawyer because he found the work interesting and enjoyed dealing with people. He also developed a knack for it.

“As a divorce lawyer, I’m pretty much self-taught,” Kane says. “Everyone who I ever had a case against taught me something. I think that’s an honest statement, because you’re supposed to pick up things from people. You throw away the stuff that you don’t think is



Kane and his wife, Macky, enjoy snow shoeing in New Hampshire.

good, and you steal the stuff that is good.”

Kane stayed with Mann, Cogan, Sklar & Lerman for five years before he decided to work with Errol Zavett, another prominent family lawyer in Chicago.

Zavett and Kane first opposed each other on a case in the late 1970s. They became friends, and Zavett invited Kane to join his law office as a tenant. The pair later decided to practice together and became part of Davis, Friedman, Zavett, Kane and MacRae in 1985.

“We have been working as partners since then, so a long damn time,” Zavett says. “It’s the longest professional relationship I’ve ever had with any other lawyer, and I’m sure he’d tell you the same for him.”

Zavett describes Kane as bright and perceptive. But, he says, one of his most unusual attributes is his ability to aggressively represent clients and still remain concerned with details.

“That may not sound to you like a contradiction, but I’m here to tell you that it is unusual,” Zavett says. “That’s not a common combination. Generally, my observation is the most aggressive lawyers don’t give a damn about detail.”

Qualities That Make a Good Lawyer

Asked what qualities make a good family lawyer, Kane says the “same qualities you need to be a good lawyer, period.”

They need to be willing to work hard and keep learning. They need to become salespeople, so they can sell themselves to clients as well as sell their clients’ position to a judge and the other side. They need to be smart and honest, especially since many people aren’t that honest, he says.

Dorene Marcus, a partner at Davis Friedman, met Kane when she applied for a job at his firm—the first time. Even though he didn’t hire her, they remained friends for more than 15 years before she joined their firm in 1996.

“I had been friends with a lot of the people here, including Larry,” Marcus says. “You know, he’s a terrific guy. He has a lot of integrity. He’s a very good man, he’s a very good person. He’s genuinely concerned about his clients and the employees, the partners, and the welfare of the firm.”

She also describes Kane as someone who takes pride in his work, gives a lot of attention to detail, and never shirks any responsibility. She calls him a financially savvy lawyer who is well equipped to handle complex matters.

As Kane became older, his clients and their children became older and his practice transitioned to more financial issues than custody issues, he says. He largely focuses on child support, maintenance, property division and tax ramifications, and how to achieve the results his clients want when dealing with those issues.

Looking Back over a Career

Kane recalls a notable moment more than 30 years ago when he learned a large divorce firm was using one of the marital settlement agreements he had drafted as their standard form.

“I don’t think they would like it to be known, but at that time, they probably had a six-person divorce-only firm, and they were now using my form,” he says. “I should be proud of that.”

He handled one case where he represented a wife who co-owned a pizza restaurant and bar with her husband. His client, her husband, her husband’s lawyer and the couple’s two

adult sons met in his office to discuss the divorce between the parents and their business, he says.

When the husband began verbally attacking one of his sons, Kane asked that son to leave the room. The husband then began verbally attacking his other son and then spat at him from across the table.

"I'll never forget it," Kane says. "The son jumped up—I can see it happening in slow motion—hailed off and whacked his father in the face, breaking his nose. Blood went flying everywhere. My chair was covered in blood. The wall was bloody. We had to call 911."

His client and her husband settled their case two weeks later, which, he says, "sounds kind of funny, but sometimes you have to bring everything to a head."

Kane works to settle cases so he can avoid losing control of his client's future and depending on a judge for a decision. Yet, he says, he sees more trials now than in previous years.

"I think people are just harder and tougher," he says. "Maybe what's happened is that the people I now represent just expect more. It's much harder to practice law now than it was five years ago.

"It's not just the clients, but it's also the lawyers. Maybe they're just being driven by the intense competition or by their clients, but they're forgetting that they should be telling their clients how this works."

Kane points out one of the most significant changes to the law has been the loss of collegiality. At one time, lawyers could zealously advocate for their clients and talk to their opponents afterward. Now, lawyers make it personal, he says.

Beermann agrees with Kane, saying that he and his friend are "cut of the same cloth when it comes to that."

One evening nearly 25 years ago, Beermann invited Kane to his office to discuss three cases they had pending against each other. They finished the first case and half of the second case, and since they rode the same train, they decided to finish the rest on their way home. They began to argue over one of the cases, catching the attention of someone sitting nearby who knew both of them.

"He said, 'I thought you guys were friends,'" Beermann says. "We looked at him, and said, 'Of course, we're friends, we're just on opposite sides of the case.' We've never forgotten that."

Kane considers himself lucky since he often hears from several clients who he represented 20 to 30 years ago. Last fall, a journalist who he represented in the late 1970s contacted

him because she needed something from her divorce decree. She also thanked him for the advice he gave her when he handled her case.

"What I told her is that every woman that I ever represented was afraid of becoming a bag lady, but that she didn't have to worry about that, her life was going to be fine," Kane says. "I represent a very bad time in people's life, and it's very nice and very gratifying when you hear from someone after some period of time that everything has turned out fine."

Lucky to Lead This Life

When Kane wasn't handling family law cases for Davis Friedman, he was serving as president of the Illinois Chapter of the Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers, working in the Illinois State Bar Association Family Law Section or volunteering or serving on the board of Chicago Volunteer Legal Services.

In the early 1990s, he chaired a subcommittee that rewrote several sections, including the maintenance and property sections, of the Illinois Marriage and Dissolution of Marriage Act. As the principal draftsman, he traveled to Springfield to lobby and pass the revised statute.

Unfortunately, Kane says, he failed to introduce himself to a young, African-American state senator who was then a member of the Illinois Senate Judiciary Committee, where the bill was pending.

"I never said hello to Barack Obama," he says. "I never introduced myself to him, which is kind of funny in retrospect. My wife and I talked about it at that time."

Kane married his wife, Macky, nearly 48 years ago. They live in Deerfield and have three adult children: Melissa, who lives with her husband and two daughters in Lakeview; Susan, who lives with her husband and daughter in Brooklyn, N.Y.; and Greg, who lives with his wife and two sons in Oak Park.

The couple enjoys traveling, and in September, they plan to hike in Acadia National Park in Maine for the 12th time. Last February, they went cross-country skiing and snow shoeing in New Hampshire for the ninth time.

"When I was 27, I didn't know what to expect out of life," Kane says. "Here I am very lucky to lead the life I live. And, I suppose, if given the same choices, I would do it all again."

Nearly 26 years after starting Davis Friedman, Kane speaks fondly of his 19-lawyer firm. They never wanted to be the largest firm; they just wanted to be, as Presiding Judge Moshe Jacobius always called them, the most honest firm.

"We have some outstanding lawyers," Kane says. "And we have some young lawyers who are learning and growing and will be outstanding lawyers with more experience."

"Lawyers spend an awful lot of time in their offices, and we have a good time here. People genuinely like each other, and we've been told our overall culture is different than anywhere else."

When Murphy met Kane, she remembers thinking he was a lawyer who knew his craft. She discovered she was right when he helped her and other young lawyers understand the mechanics of the courtroom.

"He showed the simple courtesy of helping someone along," she says. "Good lawyers do this."

She also commends Kane for serving as a good firm manager and for understanding both the practice and business of law.

"It's hard to pull the wool over his eyes," she says. "He's an old hand. He practiced before the act changed and after the act changed. He knows the law." ■

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TOP TEN FAMILY

Leading Family Lawyers in Illinois Based Upon the Surveys Conducted by Leading Lawyers Network

#3 Errol Zavett

DAVIS FRIEDMAN
Chicago

#4 Muller Davis

DAVIS FRIEDMAN
Chicago

#6 Larry R. Kane

DAVIS FRIEDMAN
Chicago

TOP 50 WOMEN CONSUMER

Leading Women Consumer Lawyers in Illinois Based Upon the Surveys Conducted by Leading Lawyers Network

Dorene Marcus

DAVIS FRIEDMAN
Chicago

Doris Schumacher McMorrow

DAVIS FRIEDMAN
Chicago