

PUBLICATION

Spotlight on Clarence Risin

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When first asked to write this article about [Clarence Risin](#), I was overwhelmed by the many directions it could take. Clarence has practiced law with Baker Donelson for 16 years. During this time, he has had great success as a trial lawyer and has actively participated in Firm management since becoming a shareholder in 2002. There is, however, an untold story about Clarence's journey to Baker Donelson and the remarkable qualities that have afforded him success in life as well as at the Firm.

Born in New Orleans, Louisiana, Clarence is one of four children who, in their early years, were raised by their mother in a single-parent household. He was orphaned at age eight by his mother's untimely death. While his sister remained in the legal custody of a family member, Clarence and his two brothers became wards of the state and were sent to group homes for their care and housing. An attempt was made to keep Clarence and one of his brothers together, but transitional living situations made this difficult and they eventually were separated.

From age eight to 18, Clarence lived in various foster care and group homes. The moves brought frequent changes in his caregivers and home environments, as well as the schools he was able to attend. His lack of stability inspired him to plan his future and led him to pursue college at Southeastern Louisiana University in Hammond.

Clarence worked diligently in college, taking classes during the summer and often staying on campus during shorter breaks. While in college, Clarence met his wife, Antoinette, and they married soon after Clarence graduated in 1990. Clarence and Antoinette relocated to Knoxville, Tennessee, shortly after their marriage so Clarence could attend the University of Tennessee College of Law. He earned his law degree in 1994, becoming the first member of his family to earn a college or professional degree.

Clarence credits a family who ran a group home in New Orleans (and who now live in Nebraska) as being instrumental in instilling in him the belief that life could be better than his then present circumstances. Over the years, this family has supported Clarence by attending his graduations from high school, college and law school. They also were present at his wedding and maintain contact with Clarence today.

Upon graduating from the University of Tennessee College of Law, Clarence joined Baker Donelson as a litigator in its Knoxville office. Over the years, he has solidified his reputation as a skilled litigator. In 2002, Clarence became a Baker Donelson shareholder, only the second diverse attorney to achieve the level of shareholder within the Firm. Since then, Clarence has seen significant change in Baker Donelson's landscape with regard to the recruitment, retention and development of diverse attorneys at all levels within the Firm, due largely to the diversity initiative commenced in 2002. Clarence was instrumental in the development and launch of this Firm initiative.

In 2002, Clarence helped form and lead the Firm's Diversity Committee at the request of Ben Adams, Firm Chairman and CEO. Under Clarence's leadership, the Firm set and reached a goal of increasing its minority attorneys by 100% in two years. The Firm also began recruitment at historically black law schools and established a formal mentoring program for diverse associates. The current Chair of the Firm's Diversity

Committee, Mark Baugh, is grateful for Clarence's past leadership, and states, "Clarence has been very instrumental in establishing a strong diversity program at the Firm." Clarence has said that diversity is important to him because he is aware of the impact that the lack of diversity can have on an otherwise rising diverse associate with the Firm.

In addition to his diversity efforts, Clarence served as Chair of the Firm's Personal Injury and Business Litigation Group from 2003 to 2006. He continues to maintain a successful commercial and transportation litigation practice and has significant experience in jury trials and appellate representation in federal and state courts. Clarence has been listed in Best Lawyers in America® in the area of Commercial Litigation since 2008 and has been voted a Top Attorney by his peers in CityView magazine since 2009. Clarence is a Fellow of the Tennessee Bar Foundation.

Outside of work, Clarence enjoys spending time with his family and often can be found tackling a landscaping project or riding horses. The Risins are active members of West Park Baptist Church in Knoxville and regularly host small-group Bible studies at their home. They currently are working to establish a food pantry at their church.