

## PROFILES IN LAW

## View From the Top: Formidable Litigator David Bianchi Used to Raise the Flag at the US Capitol

To get to the flagpole, David Bianchi had to climb a ladder, slide open a trapdoor and make his way to the roof.

by Samantha Joseph

An unusual childhood helped Stewart Tilghman Fox Bianchi & Cain founding partner David Bianchi develop an exceptional career.

As a high school student in the 1970s, Bianchi was a congressional page.

As a high school junior, he was the only New Yorker selected for the page program. With no adult supervision, Bianchi moved



J.ALBERT DIAZ/ALM

David W. Bianchi of Stewart Tilghman Fox Bianchi & Cain.

### DAVID BIANCHI

**Born:** December 1954, Bellport, New York

**Spouse:** Julia Bianchi

**Child:** Trent Bianchi

**Education:** Boston College, J.D., 1979; Tufts University, B.S., 1976

**Experience:** Partner, Stewart Tilghman Fox Bianchi & Cain, 1984-present; Attorney, Frates Floyd Pearson Stewart Richman & Greer, 1979-1984

to Washington, D.C., rented a room in a boarding house for \$1 a night and attended classes at 6:30 a.m. on the top floor of the Library of Congress.

His uniform was a black suit, white shirt and black tie — perhaps foreshadowing things to come for the future Miami attorney.

Once classes ended at 8:30 a.m., it was time to head to breakfast in the Library of Congress basement cafeteria, then walk across the street to the U.S. Capitol to start work for members of Congress. One of Bianchi's tasks involved raising and lowering the American flag on the U.S. Capitol.

"The view on the roof of the Capitol was unbelievable," he said. "It was magical to be up there."

To get to the flagpole on the U.S. House wing, Bianchi had to climb a ladder, slide open a trapdoor and make his way to the rooftop — again hinting at the agility he'd need as a litigator.

In the years that followed, he successfully represented hundreds of plaintiffs bringing significant injury, wrongful death, negligence and class action lawsuits.

## **ANTI-HAZING PIONEER**

For about four decades, he brought products liability actions and was pitted against high-powered opponents representing Chrysler, Nissan, Toyota, Firestone, Chris-Craft Boats, Yamaha, A.H. Robins, Piper Aircraft, Def-Tec and others.

"What's interesting ... is that we limit the number of cases we will take on," Bianchi said. "We have fewer cases per lawyer than almost any other law firm."

Bianchi said the five attorneys at Stewart Tilghman Fox Bianchi & Cain typically handle a total of 30 cases at a time, or about six per lawyer. The result is favorable jury verdicts or settlements in 90 percent of the cases, he said.

"You can't do that if you're a lawyer working on dozens of cases at a time," Bianchi said. "I don't know how that's possible."

Among the veteran litigator's litany of victories is a trial win that led him to participate in drafting Florida legislation to criminalize hazing — strenuous and often humiliating initiation rituals.

The result was the Chad Meredith Act, Florida's anti-hazing law named for a 18-year-old University of Miami student who drowned on campus in 2001 after a night of heavy drinking.

Bianchi represented Meredith's parents and won a \$14 million verdict — the largest at that time in the country for a fraternity haz-

ing death. He'd also helped draft the 2005 Florida law named for Meredith to make hazing a third-degree felony if it results in serious injury or death.

"Hazing has really become a passion of mine because I think it's terrible that these young guys are dying," Bianchi said.

One of his earliest cases involved a 21-year-old college student who lost both eyes when a stern cleat ripped from the deck of a Chris-Craft boat, flew through the air at about 100 mph and hit him in the face.

Bianchi was about 26 when he litigated the case that ended with a \$7.5 million verdict for the plaintiff.

"The guy who got injured was just a couple of years younger than I was," he said. "The next thing he knows, he's permanently blind. ... I think about him and that incident all the time."

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