

THE SPACAPANS | Legal Contrasts in Concert

by Julianne Kilbey

Edward and Lise Spacapan share much more than just a last name. They are both top-notch attorneys who practice blocks from each other in downtown Chicago. Both represent a wide variety of Fortune 100 companies across the country and repeatedly help tackle some of their most complex legal problems. Both are leaders at their respective firms—Ed is deputy chair of **Schiff Hardin's** Employee Benefits and Executive Compensation practice; Lise is chair of the **Jenner & Block's** Products Liability and Mass Tort Defense practice. And over the years, both have built a reputation for possessing an uncommon devotion to providing their clients with the highest level of service.

While the couple, who have been married 27 years, naturally share much in common, they are especially proud of their partnership in devoting themselves to raising their two sons and spending time together as a family. Meanwhile, the couple's differences also highlight each person's unique style and approach.

Lise, an English literature major at Vanderbilt, has a passion to deconstruct complex scientific and medical information and then explain the core concepts to a judge or jury in ways that furthers her client's case. Ed, a math and sociology major at Vanderbilt, is driven to draft precise and nuanced executive compensation agreements and other employee benefit arrangements that ensure his clients' business objectives move forward.

Ed currently represents executives of the biggest drug companies in the world and he has represented executive directors of major Chicagoland not-for-profits. Many large companies work with Ed on their structures for executive, retirement, and health benefits.

"Ed is an excellent employee benefits lawyer; he's particularly knowledgeable about executive compensation law, and I would place him among the very best attorneys in Chicago who practice in that area," says Gary W. Howell, partner at Katten Muchin Rosenman LLP. Howell's and Ed Spacapan's careers crossed paths when the two practiced together at Gardner Carton & Douglas, and they have remained close personal and professional friends ever since.

"He has this wonderful ability to not just develop an excellent conclusion, but to also



express that answer with clarity to his client."

Over the last several years, the government has increasingly scrutinized executive compensation on many fronts. With the decline in merger and acquisition work, the economic slowdown, and financial institution bailouts, Ed believes benefits/compensation lawyers will see their workload shift. Clients may want to revisit old structures, and banking clients may need advice on new limitations.

Lise regularly handles cases involving complex technical issues and has successfully defended the manufacturers of prescription drugs, medical devices, chemicals, automotive products, and industrial products. She has appeared in

numerous jury and bench trials in courts in Illinois, Missouri, Michigan, Louisiana and Colorado.

Wedding Guests Make a Connection

Both trace the roots back to the Chicago area. Ed was born in Elgin and lived in Arlington Heights. Lise was born in Florida but moved to Lisle at age 5. Her father was from northern Florida and her mother was from Chattanooga, Tennessee.

As Lise approached graduating from high school, she chose to attend Vanderbilt University in Nashville. Her parents, her brother, an aunt, an uncle, and a great uncle all studied there.

Ed also attended Vanderbilt, although he

did not meet Lise until both had graduated. He was originally interested in engineering but changed to a double major in math and sociology. The idea of law entered the picture when a neighbor offered him summer work at his small LaSalle Street firm. The lawyer then recommended Ed for a job the following summer at a larger firm, Rooks Pitts. He applied to law school that year and attended Northwestern University School of Law.

Lise, meanwhile, had graduated from Vanderbilt and entered a management training program at Marshall Field & Co. in Chicago. Though she had long entertained thoughts of law school, the store was an enjoyable place for a 22-year-old who wanted to be sure before investing time and money in law school. Eventually, she realized she would never remain in retailing, so she took the LSAT.

That year, one of Lise's sorority sisters married one of Ed's fraternity brothers in St. Louis. Lise had planned to fly to the wedding until a friend called to tell her two Vanderbilt grads were driving. One of them was Ed, and the two quickly hit it off during the drive to St. Louis.

Lise entered DePaul University College of Law a year later and became editor-in-chief of the DePaul Law Review. The couple was married in December, 10 days after Lise's first set of law school final exams.

Lise knew from the start of law school that since her interests were in English, writing, public speaking, drama, speech and music, the more performance-oriented field of litigation made sense. Ed, who started out as an engineer, found a specialty that involved an area of the law that was closer to mathematical certainty.

Although Ed thought he would focus on tax law, ERISA was relatively new at the time, so he learned that area and has been doing it ever since. "It's a nice fit with a firm like Schiff Hardin," he says, "because Schiff has a prominent corporate and securities law practice."

After graduating from law school, Lise worked her first 13 years at Kirkland & Ellis. She moved 11 years ago to Jenner & Block. Soon after Lise went into practice, she joined seven other lawyers from the firm who represented Dow Chemical in a trial that lasted two years in Michigan.

"That first trial involved the construction of a nuclear power plant and some highly technical issues. Since then, I've done a lot

of commercial litigation and commodities litigation,” she says, but her fascination with science has made it the focus of most of her work today, and she enjoys the intellectual rigor in handling the multifaceted nature of her cases.

“I have to completely understand the science in my cases so that I can explain complex details and theories to juries, who may include people with a wide variety of comfort levels and experience in discussing highly technical concepts,” she says.

Lise’s work on behalf of her clients has led her to a greater understanding of immunology, toxicology and epidemiology (in connection with tens of thousands of silicone breast implant cases), telecommunications engineering (in connection with commercial litigation over an allegedly defective product), and pharmacology (in connection with an allegedly defective pharmaceutical).

“Lise is a tenacious, determined litigator,” says Peter Jennings, an assistant general counsel at Dow Chemical who has worked with Lise for 25 years, “but I also think she is an extremely engaging, fun person to be around.”

Jennings was responsible for bringing Lise onto the team during the company’s breast implant class action defense in New Orleans to work with medical experts. “As soon as Lise joined the team, it wasn’t long before she was running the whole part of the team she was engaged with,” he remembers.

Lise more recently has taken her broad interest in mastering the science at the heart of a case to engage the broader defense bar. She was recently named chair of the 1,300-member Toxic Torts and Environmental Law Committee of DRI, the organization of civil defense lawyers.

“DRI includes the best in-house lawyers as well as the best law firm partners,” Lise says. “I hope to be able to lead and facilitate further interaction between these two groups.”

Lorna Propes, a prominent personal injury attorney at Propes & Kaveny, was the lead attorney working on the breast implant class action when she first met Lise.

“We immediately realized we were of like minds,” she recalls. The two have remained close ever since and regularly meet with two other women lawyers who worked on that class action to share ideas as well as professional and life experiences.

When Propes was president of the Chicago Inn of Court, she introduced Lise to the organization, which she later joined. “The Inn of Court is another wonderful way to meet talented lawyers and judges who practice in the Chicago legal community,” says Lise.

Propes says Ed and Lise have always been dedicated to their family. “They have been very proactive and dedicated parents in high-pressure and high-anxiety careers,” she says.

The couple have two boys, one an undergraduate at Princeton University, the other a student at Hinsdale Central High School who plays on the baseball and golf teams. Ed coached a number of his sons’ sports teams over the years.

Ed and Lise also enjoying taking trips with their children. As their sons grew, the vacations included trips to Europe, Hawaii, the Virgin Islands, Canada, and a number of national parks.

When you ask the couple how they make it all work, they’ll tell you it’s their similarities and complementary approaches that make them stronger as a couple, better parents, and successful at their individual careers.

They also say that with both parents involved in a range of professional commitments, the support network they have built of extended family and others has been vital to maximizing their time with their sons.

“The secret to our relationship may be the combination of Lise’s organized, results-driven personality and my talent for negotiation and consensus,” says Ed.

“It’s been really great, in the sense that we both went to law school, we have always been in big firms so we understand what it’s like to practice in that environment,” Lise says. “We’re both equally supportive of our family and our work.” ■