



One on One with Curtis R. Joseph, Jr., 86th LSBA President:

On Family, Goals and Moving the LSBA Forward

Interviewed by Bradley J. Tate

Curtis R. Joseph, Jr. is a partner in the Shreveport law firm, Blanchard, Walker, O'Quin & Roberts, APLC, where he handles defense as well as plaintiff-oriented litigation.

He earned a BA in mass communication in 1993 and his JD in 1996 at Washington and Lee University in Lexington, Virginia, where he was a founding member of Washington and Lee's chapter of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc.

While at Washington and Lee University, Joseph performed clinical work, focusing on post-conviction relief with the inmates of the Federal Women's Prison Camp in Alderson, West Virginia.

He taught Language Arts, Social Studies, and Religion at Bishop Perry Middle School in New Orleans, Louisiana from 1999-2000. His former students keep in touch.

Joseph is a devoted husband and father of two, as well as a local jazz/blues drummer.



(Left) Curtis R. Joseph, Jr., the 86th Louisiana State Bar Association President, with his family. From left, their son Caleb, his wife Barbara, Curtis and their daughter Ivy. Photo by Candace Chaney Photography.

(Above) Curtis R. Joseph, Jr., the 86th Louisiana State Bar Association President.



(Right and left) Barbara and Curtis R. Joseph, Jr. Photos courtesy Joseph family.
(Below) News clips of a young Curtis R. Joseph, Jr.



Curtis R. Joseph, Jr. and his mother, Linda. Photo courtesy Joseph family.



Early photo of Curtis R. Joseph, Jr. Photo courtesy Joseph family.



Tate: Thank you for taking the time to do this interview for the Louisiana Bar Journal and congratulations on becoming the next president of the Louisiana State Bar Association.

First, as the new LSBA president, tell us something about yourself that most people do not know.

Joseph: I'm a closet introvert. I've worked hard to become extroverted. But, I'm most comfortable in intimate settings with a few people. After a few months working with my first lawyer mentor, Wellborn Jack, Jr., he told me that I was the strangest mixture of introvert and extrovert that he'd ever met. He added that I was good at being extroverted, but he could tell that it drained me rather than giving me energy.

When I tell people this, they find it hard to believe. But, as with most things, Wellborn was right.

Tate: I do find it hard to believe, but I am very much the same way. I think a lot of us are. Tell us about your family.

Joseph: It's complicated. My mother had me when she was in college studying Chemistry. One of my aunts assisted her in raising me. My mother ultimately became a chemist in the Army. She was stationed in Colorado Springs, St. Louis and Hanau, Germany. I'm a military kid and, in many respects, a child of the village. In my opinion, that background has led me to what I perceive to be my greatest strength. I endeavor to see people and meet them where they are. I try to relate and do my best to move the team forward.

In terms of my family with Barbara, I'm the most blessed person you know. My parents divorced when I was 12 and my brother was 3. I yearned for the



family unit that Barbara and I've been fortunate to create. I can't brag enough on my wife and our fantastic children.

Barbara is the Executive Director of the North Louisiana Jewish Federation and, in that capacity, she wears more hats than I do. Our son, Caleb, will be 21 in June. He's studying Mechanical Engineering at the University of Alabama. He will be unable to attend the Annual Meeting in Sandestin because he'll be working as a co-op with Mercedes in Vance, Alabama. He will use vacation time to attend Ivy's high school graduation in May.

At the time of this interview, we're still not sure where Ivy will attend school in the fall. But we recently learned that she was awarded the Johnson Scholarship at Washington and Lee University, where I attended both undergrad and law school. So, we shall see. Suffice it to say, when my wife or either of my children are speaking to me and explaining something I don't quite understand, I simply smile and nod as though I do. Again, I'm blessed beyond measure.

Tate: *Tell us about your background, where did you grow up, where did you go to college?*

Joseph: I'm predominantly from Shreveport. But, due to my mom being in the Army, I grew up in Colorado, Missouri and Germany. I attended Washington and Lee University for both undergrad and law school, and I absolutely loved it.



(Top) Curtis R. Joseph, Jr. Photos courtesy Joseph family.
(Above) Curtis R. Joseph, Jr. performs on a drum kit during a recent performance.



Barry H. Grodsky, Curtis R. Joseph, Jr. and Cheri Cotogno Grodsky at the 2024 Annual Meeting. Photo by Matthew Hinton photography.

I spent every summer of law school in Lexington, Virginia, where W&L is situated. While I was in undergrad, I coached a Little League football team. I became immersed in the community. If I had it to do again, I'd make the same decision and, in that regard, I'm over the moon that Ivy may matriculate there in the fall.

Tate: *When did you know you wanted to be a lawyer?*

Joseph: My mother tells me that we were living in Colorado Springs and I came home one day when I was in the second grade and told her that I wanted to be a lawyer. She asked why and she said I looked her in the eye and told her I wanted to wear the nice suits and carry a briefcase.

Tate: *If you were not a lawyer, what would you be doing?*

Joseph: That's a trick question. I'd be a professional drummer. When I was in law school, I performed with two gentlemen who were undergrads at W&L. I graduated from law school in '96 and moved back to Shreveport. They graduated from undergrad in '97. I suggested that they move to New Orleans and I moved down. We rented an apartment on the opposite end of Octavia Street from the Grodskys and made a go of it. I taught Middle School Language Arts, Social Studies and Religion at Bishop Perry Middle School, an all-boys Catholic school in the Marigny while we played music all over the country. We self-produced a CD that was



Curtis R. Joseph, Jr. plays a drum kit. Photo courtesy Joseph family.



Curtis R. Joseph, Jr. and Barbara Joseph. Photo courtesy Joseph family.



Curtis, Barbara, Caleb and Ivy at the 2023 Annual Meeting. Photo from LSBA archives.

ultimately purchased by a local New Orleans label. I had the time of my life seeing this beautiful country of ours and playing my instrument. Carpe diem. As the kids say these days, YOLO.

Tate: *I think I probably already knew the answer to that one. One day, I'm going to see you on the drums. Tell us about your practice.*

Joseph: My practice is varied and essentially a combination of the stops that I made along the way. My first employer, Wellborn Jack, Jr. was a trial lawyer whose practice encompassed high-end plaintiff personal injury work and criminal defense. I then worked for Willie Singleton, practicing plaintiff personal injury. At the time I was at Mr. Singleton's office, he was heavily engaged in the Tobacco Class Action and my primary function was to keep the other files moving. My next employer was Ronald F. Lattier.

At Ron's office, I was primarily focused on civil defense work. Interesting tidbit: while working for Ron, I met and worked with Judge Karella Stewart and Senae Hall, both of whom I'm exceedingly proud to call friends. Thereafter, I opened an office with Mary Winchell and we rented office space from Marshall Jones and John Odom. During that timeframe (approximately 7 years), I relied upon the prior work that I'd done to cobble together a practice. In 2022, I went to my current office at Blanchard, Walker, O'Quin & Roberts where I was, incidentally, a runner when I was an undergraduate during the summers of 1991-1992. These days, I do my best to mentor the fantastic young attorneys in our firm in between the significant amount of time that I'm away from the office.

Tate: *Do you have a favorite case?*

Joseph: My favorite case is actually one of my first ones. Wellborn wanted to get me into court. So, he handed me a file from a longstanding client of his. The gentleman owned property in North Caddo Parish close to the Red River. His property was on both sides of the levee. There was a drought during the summer of 2000. So, he ran a line from his well, which was on the street side of the levee, to a garden hose, which he draped across the levee and ran it to a trough that he'd installed a shutoff valve on. Consequently, his cows would drink from the trough and it would fill without overflowing. The Levee Board filed for an Injunction, demanding that he remove the hose from "their" levee. He was a recalcitrant old man and he wanted to fight. We prevailed and he was allowed to leave the hose on the levee while we applied to the Army Corps of Engineers for a permanent line from the well to the trough. I thoroughly enjoyed fighting for the little guy. He had rights, too.

Tate: *Who have been some of your role models in the practice of law and the legal profession?*

Joseph: For me, it all starts with Wellborn Jack, Jr. Google him. He was the real deal. He made his fortune in plaintiff's personal injury. But his heart was in defending



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folks charged with crimes. He enjoyed getting immersed in the minutia and he made opposing counsel work. They hated to see him coming. He took an interest in me and brought me from Virginia to Shreveport. And when I walked into his office on a Tuesday evening to tell him that I was moving to New Orleans on Friday to play music, he said that I was a bird that needed to be free. There was no animus. Even more, when I called him 3 years later and told him that Barbara and I were in a serious relationship and that I wanted to move back to Shreveport, he welcomed me with no questions.

Curtis, Barbara, Caleb and Ivy Joseph at the 2022 Annual Meeting. Photo from LSBA archives.

Tate: *What is your advice for young lawyers just starting their practices?*

Joseph: If I was to give a spiel to young lawyers at the inception of their practice it would be two-fold. (1) Remember that the earth is round. What goes around comes around. Treat people right. Opposing counsel, clerks, bailiffs, secretaries and staff. Do the right thing. And (2), whatever it is that you do that makes you whole, don't give that up. Continue being you. Don't give up on the other things that bring you joy. Make time for them and cherish balance. It just might keep you sane.



Ivy, Barbara, Caleb and Curtis Joseph. Photo courtesy Joseph family.

Tate: *Why did you run for president of the LSBA?*

Joseph: Those who know me will attest that my life has been one devoted to service. I firmly believe that our lives are made useful by serving others. In 2019, I was given the opportunity to serve as the President of the Shreveport Bar Association and I cherished that opportunity. I never even thought about becoming involved in the State Bar.

During my tenure as the Shreveport Bar President, I encountered Bob Kutcher, who is an LSBA institution unto himself. Bob reached out and stated that he thought I should get involved in the State Bar. He appointed me to the House of Delegates. However, Covid happened and we didn't really do much. Some time thereafter, Bob suggested that I consider running for the Board of Governors, which I did. He actually had to tell me which Board district I was in. In any event, during my 3-year term on the Board, I fell in love. I became enamored with the servant leaders and the amazing staff. And when my term ended, I wanted to serve the Bar and its 23,000 lawyers in the highest capacity.

Tate: *How do you hope to advance access to justice this year?*

Joseph: As you know, all states are suffering from the concept of legal deserts. Louisiana is no different in that regard. As of this past February, there are 23,168 lawyers in good standing in the state. As I appreciate it, approximately 90% of those lawyers practice south of I-10, which leaves



Curtis R. Joseph, Jr., Barry H. Grodsky, H. Minor Pipes III and Robert A. Kutcher. Photo from LSBA archives.



Curtis and Ivy Joseph.
Photo courtesy Joseph family.



Curtis, Ivy, Barbara and Caleb Joseph.
Photo courtesy Joseph family.

about 2,300 lawyers to service the balance of the state.

We currently have a robust ATJ program headed up by Amy Duncan, who follows Monte Mollere, and they're doing a fine job. I will assist them as much as possible. I will be available to them. As you can imagine, access to competent civil legal representation will only become more an issue as the cost of living increases, wages stagnate and disposable income becomes compromised.

Tate: *What are your objectives for your year as president?*

Joseph: One of the primary things I'd like to accomplish is to get more North Louisiana lawyers involved in the State Bar. I'm already seeing lawyers reach out indicating a desire to play a part. I've received so many calls, text messages, emails and the like from lawyers who are now paying attention to our Bar. I've even received some handwritten notes, believe it or not.

I don't pretend to be the most intelligent person in the room. But I do believe that my personality lends itself toward welcoming others into the fold. And, again, I'm seeing that play out. I'd love to bring as many people along as possible because I'd like to share with them how special our Bar is.

I want to be the Bar emissary. Want people to walk away from all things LSBA feeling good. I realize that, in many respects, for the Bar year, I will be seen as the personification, the brand of the Bar. And I want to use that platform to get as many people engaged as possible. Bearing in mind that the staff makes our pirate ship move and I'll only hold the position for a year.





(From left) LSBA Presidents, past and present: Joseph L. (Larry) Shea, Jr.; Curtis R. Joseph, Jr.; Hon. Darrel J. Papillion; S. Guy deLaup; Alainna R. Mire; Robert A. Kutcher; Edward J. Walters, Jr.; David F. Bienvenu; Kim M. Boyle; Michael W. (Mike) McKay; and Barry H. Grodsky. Photo from LSBA archives.

Tate: Tell us about your feelings on the state of our profession and the future.

Joseph: I'm concerned but hopeful. As it relates to our Bar Association, specifically, we're on solid footing. Again, I can't say enough about our staff and how amazing they are. So, I'm hopeful because of my association with those with whom I serve in conjunction. However, we must be cognizant of the attacks on law firms, individual lawyers, DAs, judges, and in many regards, our entire system of governance.

But, I trust that lawyers will be there as they always have been to steady our course. What do I mean by that? Many misapply the quote from Shakespeare's Henry VI, when Dick the Butcher said, "The first thing we do, let's kill all the lawyers." The truth of the matter is that those who would establish tyranny or chaos would first need to eliminate those who strive to uphold the rule of law. That's where we step in. Lawyers have made a difference for humanity throughout time. I see no reason for that to change now.

Tate: What are some of the challenges you see for lawyers as a profession?

Joseph: Aside from the attacks on the rule of law mentioned earlier, the advent of artificial intelligence (AI) cannot be overstated. Many tasks that were previously given to young lawyers will be offloaded to AI. However, I liken it to a tool in the same vein as Westlaw, Lexis and others. In my opinion, AI definitely expedites the process. However, it will never have bedside manner. Consequently, as lawyers I would suggest that we lean on the "counselor at law" aspect of what we provide as a service.

Tate: What is the most rewarding thing about being a lawyer?

Joseph: Helping people. On any given day, I represent Walmart, small municipalities, people involved in catastrophic

accidents and grandmothers whose grandchild needs a lawyer who will provide legal assistance and won't judge them because of something they allegedly did on their worst day. To that point, I was at the Independence Bowl this year and a former client, whom I represented years ago when he found himself in a bind, came up to me to tell me how he turned his life around after he was given a second chance due to my representation. He now shares his talents with our youth and when he tells his story, he mentions me...the lawyer who helped him.

Tate: Thanks, Curtis. I am looking forward to working with you this year.



Curtis R. Joseph, Jr. at the Grand Canyon. Photo courtesy Joseph family.