

# PUBLICATION

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## Sparta to Memphis: Bruce McMullen Shares His Path to Success

**Authors: Bruce Anthony McMullen**

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by Katie Marren

Bruce McMullen is a shareholder in Baker Donelson's Memphis office and focuses his practice in health care law and commercial litigation. Over the years, Bruce has built a successful career, earning an AV® Preeminent™ Peer Review Rating by Martindale-Hubbell, and listings in *The Best Lawyers in America*® since 2009 and in *Mid-South Super Lawyers*. Bruce also has held board positions in various organizations, including the National Bar Association, Memphis Area Legal Service, and the Memphis Urban Debate League. He is a Fellow in the Memphis Bar Foundation. We recently talked with Bruce to find out how his past experiences, from growing up in a small town in Georgia to his work in the insurance industry, helped shape his career.

### **Q: You currently practice in Memphis, but have you always lived there?**

A: No, I was born and raised in the small town of Sparta, Georgia. I went to college at the University of Georgia in Athens and I lived and worked in Macon, GA for five years after college. I moved to Memphis after law school at the University of Tennessee and now consider it home.

### **Q: Who have been your biggest influences?**

A: My parents who were teachers in my local school system. My mother was my first grade teacher, and from what I recall I enjoyed her class. My father taught my high school social studies class. I had heard most of the class lectures at home so I had a slight advantage over the other students. They were great parents.

### **Q: Did you have a career before law school?**

A: After graduating from the University of Georgia, my first job was in the insurance industry. I worked in claims management for a large insurance company for five years and earned a MBA at Georgia College & University. My experience in claims and risk management was extremely valuable, and affirmed my longstanding desire to attend law school. I attended the University of Tennessee College of Law. Initially I wanted to be a transactional lawyer, but once I was in law school advocacy became more and more appealing. UT had a new advocacy program which was extremely attractive to me.

### **Q: What type of work did you first do as an attorney?**

A: I started doing primarily insurance defense and medical malpractice. My earlier experiences in the insurance industry made that type of practice a perfect fit. At that time, many more cases went to trial, particularly medical malpractice cases, and that gave me an opportunity to get into the courtroom early in my career. From the beginning, I pursued as much trial work as possible. Because of the high exposure involved in many of the cases I handle today, few of them make it to trial. However, I do get back in trial about once a year and I love it.

### **Q: What do you think has helped you to have such a successful career?**

A: When I worked in the insurance industry, I dealt with lawyers on a regular basis and realized firsthand the frustration that clients often feel when their goals and their lawyer's goals were misaligned. Often clients want early resolution and to limit exposure despite the lawyer's assurance that the case can be won. After having been on the receiving end of legal services, I try to consider the wishes of my clients by providing the types of services and information they want which is not always what we as lawyers consider important or relevant to our legal strategy. Lawyers generally think in terms of trial strategy not risk management.

Additionally, I grew up in a very opinionated family. My parents, four siblings and I had very diverse views on various issues and loved to discuss them. I learned early on to look at situations objectively and to consider all sides. It is amazing how useful this skill is in preparing a case for trial or anticipating challenges when trying to achieve a positive result for a client.

**Q: What do you do in your free time?**

A: I love to follow my kids' activities. My daughter, Zoe Marie, and son, Reese, are involved in everything! They are into basketball, football, soccer, piano, dance and theater, to name a few. They always manage to keep me and my wife busy.

**Q: What advice do you have for lawyers who are just beginning their career?**

A: Always remember that the practice of law is an apprenticeship occupation. Learn as much as you can from as many different lawyers as possible. Also, seek out opportunities that allow you to grow and develop professionally – especially those that push you out of your comfort zone. It is those experiences that will help distinguish your skill set, from others.

Finally, waste no experience. No matter how routine or mundane a task may seem, find something you can take away from it. File it away in your head for a later time. You will be surprised how useful it will become in the future.