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# LEADING LAWYERS

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A portrait of Martin Healy, Jr., a middle-aged man with light brown hair, wearing a dark blue pinstriped suit jacket, a white shirt, and a red and white striped tie. He is smiling slightly and has his arms crossed. A gold watch is visible on his left wrist, and a ring is on his left hand.

## Martin Healy, Jr. The Gentleman Injury Lawyer

Securing Record Verdicts  
Without Getting  
His Irish Up

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# Martin Healy, Jr.

## Irish Wisdom Translates to Multimillion Dollar Results for the Injured

by Jack Silverstein

When his father was a 10-year-old in Ireland he would feed his family by gaffing for salmon on the River Moy.

The gaff is a pole like a harpoon but with a blade at the top that loops back toward the bottom, forming a hook. On the Moy, the gaffer — the person using the gaff — would stand on the riverbed and when a salmon would swim past, he or she would jut the gaff into the water and hook the fish from underneath, through its torso. With a quick jerk on the pole the fish was caught.

Martin J. Healy Jr. of **Healy Scanlon Law Firm** still enjoys telling stories about his father evading the Englishmen who patrolled the river — while on the hunt for his family's next meal.

"Gaffing was the poor man's way of getting a salmon," Healy says. "It was done for sustenance. The family needed it. He would be the big hero when he would come in with a salmon, freshly caught. They would feast on that for a while."

Years later, after he graduated from Loyola University Chicago School of Law and began his practice, Healy traveled to Ireland with his father, who had left his home country when he was still a teenager.

The two men went shotgun-hunting for grouse and hare and met some children who knew the elder Healy by reputation as a hunter and swimmer. The respect paid to his father tickled the younger Healy, then a man in his 20s.

On the hunt, though, there could be no distractions.

"You had a lot of responsibility because you are carrying a loaded shotgun," says Healy. "You had to be very aware of what was going on — and those are skills you use in the practice of law."

The Moy was too low that trip in the 1970s to gaff any salmon. But joining his father in his homeland was a dream for the personal injury attorney, who even got to see the house where his father grew up.

Living in that home as one of 10 children, the elder Healy learned the necessity of the hunt, how to hone desperation into an eye

for spotting salmon swimming upstream and holding the gaff stiff as the fish advanced. And then the gaff in the water and the day's hunt speared.

### Lessons Learned From Parents

Martin Healy was born the second of three children to Irish immigrants. His father, Martin Sr., spent much of his career working as a plumber for the city of Chicago. His mother, Mary Catherine, raised the children until Parkinson's prevented it.

"We just came together as a team to take care of my mother," Healy says about his family, which includes older sister Patricia and younger sister Eileen. "We are very close today as a result of how we were brought up."

Mary Catherine Healy contracted the disease when her son was in grammar school. Despite that — or perhaps because of it — she was known for her strength and vision.

"I drew an awful lot of inspiration from her and from my father," Healy says. "A lot of hard work, focus, knowing where you wanted to go and getting there."

He learned something else, too.

"I think that relationship probably gave me a lot of empathy for people who do suffer," he says. "I saw her suffering for a long time."

By the time Healy graduated from Notre Dame, his mother had difficulty walking. But she attended the graduation in South Bend, smiling silently at her son after he accepted his diploma.

"Not much else needed to be said," he says.

She lived to see him receive his full-ride scholarship to Loyola. She died before he graduated.

"My mother didn't see that, but I don't think she needed that," Healy says. "My father, maybe after all he had gone through — coming over here and starting a family, educating kids and all that — I think it made him feel good."

From his mother he learned compassion — both the compassion she had for others and the compassion the family had for her. He gained work ethic from his father, whom he can only remember missing work

once — the ulcer's fault.

"That was the only time," he says. "I never remember him taking a day off. He was very focused. He wanted us to get the best education. He wanted to get a home for the family. Wanted to take care of my mother. Did that."

"I think it taught me that if you do want things, it's going to take some hard work."

The family lived in the Resurrection Parish in the West Side neighborhood of Austin in a two flat on West Adams Street, just past Laramie. The neighborhood was heavily Irish and Italian, with some Poles and Jews mixed in.

"In grammar school, I never met an attorney," Healy says. "My parents had no need for one. There were no relatives who were one. Probably the first time that I ever met an attorney was in college."

In high school Healy got a summer job with the engineers' union at O'Hare, operating earthmoving equipment known as scrapers to create new runways. His father's connections, personal and professional, helped Healy get the job.

"As a pretty young kid — I think I was 17 when I started — from our neighborhood that was certainly the best summer job that anyone had," he says.

Some years later he was working with his father, both employees of the city, Martin Healy Sr. a plumber for the water department, Martin Healy Jr. the first assistant corporation counsel.

The younger Healy smiles when he tells that story.

"He was proud of that."

### Consummate Pro Wears His Tie Up

The lights in the waiting room of the Healy Scanlon Law Firm reflect off the mahogany handrails of the office chairs, so seeing the floral patterns sewn into the seat backs and cushions can be difficult on bright days.

But the wood is visible throughout the room, from the chairs to the coffee table to the two-layered end-table between the chairs with the gold-plated drawer handles



to the stained floor to the brown trim frame around the mirror on a nearby hallway wall.

On the other side of the waiting room, a rectangular leather brass-button ottoman sits next to a six-foot Hoosier cabinet, with a dual-lamp atop the cabinet's folded-down desk shelf.

Healy's dress matches his decor.

"He's a guy who always wears his tie up, even in the office," says Illinois Supreme Court Justice Thomas Kilbride, who was the liaison to the Supreme Court Rules Committee when Healy was chair.

"He might have his jacket off but he's got his tie snugged up. He's what I would call a consummate professional. He's always dressed to the t's. A dapper dresser."

Healy's office, down the hall, is designed similarly to the waiting room, though with a few key differences. Most notably are the models of the types of construction equipment he operated at O'Hare in his teenage years: scrapers, rollers, high lifts and cranes.

His construction "knick-knacks," he says.

There are model vehicles from his cases, such as a Yamaha motorcycle, and shelves filled with case files, and a painting of a four-tiered sailboat.

And on this day in May in Healy's Burnham Center office at 111 W. Washington Street, a six-foot white poster board leans against the wall listing the speed a semi-truck was traveling in 2002 when it collided with a Pontiac.

"Three teenagers, 17-year-olds, were killed in Indiana," Healy says of the occupants of the Pontiac, motioning down at the board from his 6-foot-2-inch frame. Healy's firm still represents the two passengers of the Pontiac, even though he won a jury verdict of about \$20 million in Cook County Circuit Court in 2007.

Since then, the case wound its way up and down state court and was, on this day, back in circuit court. None of the \$20 million had to that point been paid.

The board shows the respective speeds of the truck at different times starting from a minute prior to the truck reaching zero miles per hour to a few seconds after.

"What we have here is a consistent half-mile-per-hour to mile-per-hour per second decrease — a gradual decrease," he says, pointing to the speeds and times on the board. "And all of a sudden you have this, right here," he says, showing on the board where the truck's speed in one second decreased from 49.5 mph to 46 mph.

"Something happened there that they can't explain," he says about the defense's argument. "And what we say is: That's the impact."

Healy is calm throughout this impromptu presentation, but passion and



Healy with his oldest grandson, Jack, who is now 8.



Healy is a past president of the Irish Fellowship Club of Chicago. Pictured from left: son Marty, daughter Jill, Healy, wife Joanne, son Mike and son Matt.

determination bubble underneath, evident when he discusses the impact of the litigation duration on the families.

"He was not a bully," says John Huston of Tressler LLP whose practice focuses on civil defense work. "I've had those meetings with other lawyers — scare-tactics, like, 'You're going to get destroyed. I've tried a bunch of these cases and you're going down.'"

Huston and Healy have tried three cases against each other. Most memorable for them was the "Duffy" case about a young man who injured himself diving into a friend's pool at a party at 4 a.m. Healy felt a personal connection to the case because the young man, Duffy, was an Irish immigrant who worked in the same trades as Healy's father.

He and another member of the firm, Jack Cannon who will become president of the Workers' Compensation Lawyers Association next year, represented Duffy. Huston represented the company that made the plastic lining in the pool.

The pool itself was unusual. Rather than a shallow end and a deep end, the ends were shallow and the middle was deep.

Having already been on one end of the pool, Healy's client — who had been drinking — assumed the other side of the pool was the deep end. He dove in and fractured his cervical vertebrae.

"There were never any angry fights," Huston says. "There was never ugliness, and I give him the credit for that."

Healy won an \$8 million verdict against the pool-maker while Huston's client was found not to be at fault.

Hugh Griffin, a defense attorney with Hall Prangle and Schoonveld LLC, got to know Healy during their nine years together on the Supreme Court Rules Committee.

Griffin recalls the two of them working on the creation of Rule 305, which allows a circuit court to allow an appeal even when a defendant cannot afford a full appeal bond. He calls that debate "a true example

of (Healy's) character."

"His personal interests would have probably been to not have that rule, but I think that he realized that it was in the best interest of the law in general," Griffin says.

The eight other attorneys at Healy's firm are, Huston says, "all gentlemen."

"That starts at the top," Huston says. "It requires leadership. You might get one or two guys who are nice at an office but you don't get an entire office full of gentlemen unless the person who runs the place requires it, hires it, trains that way and works that way himself.

"Win, lose or draw, I admire that."

## A Legal Voice for Chicago Irish

When Irish boys like Healy's father left their home country, family members called it an "Irish wake." These boys would leave for the United States and, in many cases, never see their families again.

"They would leave on a steamship and it would take a long time to get to where they were going," Healy says. "Many left and never came back. So you were kind of seeing the kid for maybe the last time."

Healy's trip to Ireland in the 1970s with his father was the older man's first trip home since before Healy or his siblings were born. The trip built an even stronger bond for Healy with his father's homeland, one that continues today with his involvement in Chicago's Irish community.

He writes a monthly column called "On the Law" for the Irish American News, a publication whose tagline is "the Voice of Chicagoland's Irish American Community." He has served as president of the Celtic Legal Society of Chicago, the Association of Irish Lawyers and the Irish Fellowship Club of Chicago. And in 2014, the Irish American Heritage Center awarded him "Person of the Year" for his

support and dedication to the Irish culture.

His involvement in these groups is "important because I am Irish," he says, though he is also quick to compliment other ethnic groups.

"I don't do it with any closed attitude about it," he says. "I just came from a strong Irish background because of my parents."

Ethnicity and language played another role in his life. As an honor student at Saint Ignatius College Prep, Healy studied Latin, Greek, French and Russian, a scholarship that "prepares you for writing and speaking later on," he says.

That training helped him build a career that catches one client after another with two of a trial lawyer's most important business-building tools: verdicts and settlements.

Last year, Healy Scanlon Law Firm secured a \$9 million settlement against Occidental Insurance for the 2007 death of a construction worker run over by a semi-dump truck. It was, according to the Jury Verdict Reporter's settlement newsletter, the largest compensatory recovery ever in Illinois in a case involving a bad-faith failure to pay a policy.

Recently, Healy also gave the closing argument in the case of the three teenagers killed in the car accident in Indiana. The case settled for a confidential amount while the jury was deliberating, ending 13 years of litigation.

For Duffy, the gentleman who injured himself diving into the pool, Healy secured an \$8 million verdict against the pool-maker. That is one of 12 verdicts of \$5 million or more he has secured in his career.

And in the Yamaha motorcycle products liability case — the one for which he keeps a model Yamaha — Healy and partner John Scanlon, who next year will become the second member of the firm to serve as president of the Illinois Trial Lawyers Association, nabbed a \$24 million verdict for a rider whose crash left him a paraplegic.

"One of the most effective advertising tools is a very satisfied client," Healy says.

It's a worldview he picked up early in his career working for and talking with trial lawyers James A. Dooley, John J. Kennelly and Philip H. Corboy.

Dooley was the first president of the Illinois Trial Lawyers Association. Many years later, Healy was the 45th.

"Our approach was to go out and get the results, and the results speak for themselves — by results I mean usually jury verdicts — and the results bring in the new clients," Healy says. "It is a different approach from the intense advertising for clients."

According to the Jury Verdict Reporter, the Yamaha verdict was a record verdict for Cook County for a paraplegic. It remained a



Healy's family celebrates at his law firm's Christmas party at Trump Tower. From left: Healy, wife Joanne, son Matt, daughter Jill Fowler, her husband Tim Fowler, son Marty and son Mike.



At the 100th anniversary of the Irish Fellowship Club of Chicago, from left: son Matt, son-in-law Tim Fowler, daughter Jill Fowler, Healy, wife Joanne, Irish tenor John McDermott, son Marty and son Mike.

record for seven years until 2009, when Healy received a verdict for another client rendered a paraplegic in an accident. This time, the verdict was for more than \$25 million.

In 25 years of plaintiff's practice, Healy has gotten 14 multimillion dollar jury verdicts, many of them records.

Along with lessons learned from Dooley, Kennelly and Corboy, Healy gained "the basics of practice" during his three years after law school clerking for Illinois Supreme Court Justice Thomas Kluczynski.

"What I was lacking in a lot of the practical applications of law, he filled in," Healy says. "He almost became a second father to me."

Healy carried those lessons into Healy Scanlon Law Firm, which he founded in 1990 as The Healy Law Firm. He considers the verdict for the Yamaha rider, Tony O'Brien, one of the best he has ever secured.

"He's very comforting," says O'Brien, 41, who was 22 in 1996 when his Yamaha YZ 125 faltered on a jump and dumped him on his back. "He treated you like he knew you for a long time. It wasn't like a cold shoulder. He talked to you like a real person."

O'Brien connected with Healy about a year after his accident. He was impressed by Healy's ability to compete with a major corporation.

"It seemed like they were always a step ahead of Yamaha," O'Brien said about the firm. "Yamaha could never get a foothold on anything. Just the way [Healy's firm] did the whole process — it was like they planned it out."

O'Brien's faith in Healy and Scanlon was so strong that he passed on a pair of settlement offers. The first, Healy says, "wouldn't even cover the expenses of the case."

After Healy's closing argument, the defense offered \$3.5 million.

Upon receiving that offer, Healy told O'Brien that the firm could not advise O'Brien against taking it.

"I said, 'Tony, now it's a little different,'" Healy recalls. "You're not going to get a lot of money, relatively speaking, but it will cover costs and things like that and you could walk away with maybe \$2 million dollars. It's your decision."

That was enough for O'Brien.

"They were very confident in going through the whole trial," O'Brien says. "I feel that if they thought we were going to lose, they would have said, 'Take the money.' I guess I just had a lot of trust in them."

O'Brien still remembers the exact moment when, sitting in a Cook County circuit court, he knew he'd won. With his parents, brother and sister-in-law in the courtroom, O'Brien watched the bailiff take a sheet of paper from



Healy's office window offers a view of the Daley Center. Since his days as a law clerk for the Illinois Supreme Court, much of his career has involved that building.



From left: Sons Michael and Matt, Healy and son Marty enjoyed a four-day back country trail ride several years ago from Beaver Creek to Aspen, Colorado.

the jury and hand it to the judge.

As O'Brien waited for the judge's announcement, Healy put his hand on O'Brien's shoulder and leaned toward him.

"You won," Healy whispered to O'Brien.

Healy had seen figures written on the paper. That meant a verdict in favor of the plaintiff.

"I thanked Mr. Healy and John, and then I looked over at my parents," O'Brien says. "My mom was crying. And I believe I started to cry myself."

In the end, O'Brien received about \$14 million. He bought a house in his home town of Manhattan, Illinois, and another in Alabama. He put some money in an annuity which pays him a monthly income, a process through which the firm guided him.

He describes his quality of life as "very good, actually."

Though O'Brien does not like to talk about the specifics of the accident, he shared one moment in his trial that stands out as special.

During Healy's examination, he asked O'Brien one final question: "Tony," Healy said, "what's it like every morning knowing you can't put on a new pair of shoes and go for a walk?"

"That just really caught me off guard," O'Brien says. "I started crying. I didn't have much to say, you know?"

### Inspiring the Next Generation

After earning his J.D. in 2003 at University of Illinois College of Law, Matthew J. Healy began his career in law at his father's firm. He is the grandson of Martin J. Healy Sr. and one of four children to Martin Healy Jr. and Joanne Mulhern Healy, who have been married for 45 years.

Martin Healy has kept his children involved with the firm. His sons clerked in the office. Daughter Jill handles the firm's PR. Son Matthew is the latest Healy to work in personal injury law. He describes

his father as “a serious and disciplined man in all facets of his life.

“He instilled in all of us kids the importance of a firm handshake, looking people in the eyes and addressing people with their names,” says Matthew Healy, 40.

When Matthew was younger, Healy took him and the other children hunting, imparting the lessons Healy learned from his father.

“Never point a gun at anybody,” Matthew Healy recalls his father telling the children. “Carry the double-barreled with the break-action open, never get ahead of your partners.”

“If we could demonstrate a mastery of the safety aspects,” Matthew Healy says today, “then he would entrust us with a gun to walk the field with him. Anything we did growing up, my dad was always evaluating the safety aspects of it and cautioning us.”

This included safety goggles while mowing the lawn and, before it was common, helmets while riding bikes.

“My brother and I were the most padded-up players on the football field,” Matthew says. “Once when we were teens my dad strongly encouraged my friend to sell his recently acquired used SUV because the SUV had poor rollover ratings.

“Safety, as he sees it, must come first.”

Today, Martin Healy enjoys skiing and hiking in Colorado with his family that now has three grandchildren. Those family adventures included a four-day back country trail ride from Beaver Creek to Aspen about seven years ago with his three sons.

Part of Healy’s success, Matthew Healy says, is that he is “mentally sharp.”

“But there are a lot of sharp attorneys in Chicago,” Matthew says. “I think the edge he has over some of his opponents in the courtroom is that he will always outwork or out-prepare them. Working long and hard is what he does. I believe he learned the hard work mantra from my grandpa, who himself learned it from the hard immigrant experience.”

Today, Matthew Healy is Of Counsel to the Healy Scanlon Law Firm and is a sole practitioner in Denver. About 90 years after his grandfather crept along the Moy to gaff dinner for the family, Matthew follows his father’s footsteps, building his practice one client at a time.

“We did it,” Martin Healy Jr. says, “the old fashioned way.” ■