

Milestone a proud moment for Farmington Hills attorney

BY JULIE BROWN
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Findling

Fred S. Findling and The Findling Law Firm in Royal Oak are celebrating their 50th anniversary. He's found that a diverse practice is the key to success.

"If you take a variety of cases, it makes the practice interesting," said the 76-year-old Findling. He's also enjoyed cases with human interest: "So that made the work more interesting. That's what kept me going."

Findling, a Farmington Hills resident, became a member of the State Bar of Michigan on Jan. 23, 1957.

He was born in Cologne, Germany, and is a survivor of the Holocaust where both of his parents died. His father was shot in Poland and his mother gassed at Auschwitz-Birkenau. As an 11-year-old, he fled Europe and came to Detroit as an orphan.

MOVED TO DETROIT

The younger Findling was in hiding in southern France during the war years before coming to Detroit. "I suppose I knew the only way I could make a decent living was to pursue an education," he said. He heard about others without college who made a good living, but stuck with school seven years: "I don't know what it was that made me persevere and say 'I'll wait.'"

"Scholarships were scarce in those days so we had to work. I did everything that came along." He was a busboy and worked the school candy counter. In law school, Findling was a dorm proctor, keeping track of student comings and goings for the building.

In 1954, he received a bache-

lor's degree and in 1956, a juris doctor degree from Wayne State University. He's admitted to all state and federal courts, including the U.S. Supreme Court.

Findling's legal career began in the Cadillac Tower in Detroit. Three of his sons, David Findling, Darren Findling and Daniel Findling, have joined his firm. The Findling Law Firm has 12 lawyers and more than 40 employees.

CIVIL RIGHTS

Early in his career, Fred Findling was drawn to civil rights. In 1963, he spent time in Danville, Va., representing African Americans who were charged with demonstrating. He then filed Habeas Corpus Petitions for 365 incarcerated

people in the Virginia Supreme Court even after he was threatened to leave the state within 24 hours for his safety.

"Those were the days when idealistic young lawyers all responded to the call," he said of the civil rights movement, citing lawyer Dean Robb and other local lawyer-activists as motivating him.

Findling was then in the National Lawyers Guild and on the board of the Detroit chapter. "We were all active in those days. We were all interested in civil rights." He was then a young married man, but went to Danville and Richmond to try to get people out of jail.

"I stayed up all night mimeographing copies," he recalled. He was threatened and the court wouldn't accept his papers. The people remained behind bars.

In Detroit, he represented civil rights activists. During the 1967 riots, he was a pro bono attorney for hundreds of rioters appearing in Records Court.

Findling recalled the around-the-clock legal work for preliminary exams then in Records Court. "I was one of the team heads." There were 6,000 people incarcerated on Belle Isle, mostly for curfew violation.

He was a pioneer in Chapter 13 Bankruptcy law. "I was

known as Lucky 13," he said, describing the process to help stop foreclosures during the 1970s and 1980s and beyond. He lectured at the University of Michigan Law School and the Institute of Continuing Legal Education.

Recently, he obtained an award in an auto case totaling over \$4.9 million and another for \$1.3 million. Findling's seen a lot of changes in the law in his years of practice.

In the beginning, there weren't court rules which later simplified things. He recalled the cumbersome need to type documents and make carbon copies.

"That was cumbersome. Form was very important."

He and The Findling Law Firm host a weekly radio show titled "The Findling Law Hour" 3-4 p.m. Saturdays on 97.1 FM. He has four children from his first marriage and two from his second. In addition to the sons at the firm, his oldest daughter, a Ph.D., is assistant director for a large foundation in San Francisco.

"She's the most popular woman in San Francisco. She gives away all that money." His youngest two children are at Wayne State already or due to enroll this fall.

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