

Jim Kelley | Bart Pickett



Growing up in the northeastern Ohio, Jim Kelley found himself as far away from Tennessee in Ohio that you could be. He grew up as the only child in a typical, blue collar family. Jim spent time during the summers with his maternal grandmother who lived in Dover, Tennessee. It was no surprise when it came time for college, his mother pushed for what she thought was the best choice, Vanderbilt University.

When Jim arrived in Nashville in 1966, he found it to be a “small town” and quite inward looking, particularly when compared to present-day Nashville. He majored in math and graduated in 1970. While he loved his time at Vanderbilt, he could not wait to get out of Nashville, and headed north to Cleveland, Ohio. After a couple of winters there, however, he changed his mind—he wanted both warmer weather and a change of jobs. After working two years as a systems analyst for Standard Oil, he decided the corporate world was not for him.

In 1972, Jim moved back down south to Atlanta to attend Emory University Law School. He graduated in 1975 and started working as an associate at a local firm while also en-

rolling in the LLM in Taxation night program at Emory. As he finished up his Masters in Tax, the Nashville firm of Dearborn and Ewing reached out to him, as they just happened to be looking for a tax attorney. He met with the firm and accepted a job that proved to be life-changing, staying there from 1977 to 1990.

In 1990, Jim joined Neal and Harwell—where he still practices today—in business and finance matters with a particular emphasis on representing banks. Most of his work these days is transactional, although his work sometimes includes litigation when bankruptcy is involved.

Jim and his first wife, Lisa, enjoyed a wonderful marriage of 32 years before her unfortunate passing due to cancer in 2016. They have one daughter, Kathleen, who lives in DC and works for an audio/visual company focusing on corporate events. Jim gleefully tells about his 4.5 month old granddaughter, his first. As soon as he was two weeks post-vaccination, he headed to DC to see the baby. Jim still lives in the house on Richland Avenue that he bought in 1987 and converted from an apartment house back to single family.

In a fortunate series of events, some friends convinced Jim to go on a two-week cruise around the Iberian Peninsula in 2017 with a big group of people. Unbeknownst to him, Dr. Anne O’Duffy also signed up for the trip. Although the two had known each other for about 20 years, they had not really hung out before then. They hit it off and have been travelling through life since their marriage in June 2018.

The couple’s passion for travel

has made the pandemic that much harder, as Jim describes them as very serious travelers. Jim himself has visited more than 80 countries in his lifetime. He always keeps a trip on the books to look forward to, and if it gets cancelled, he schedules the next. Their trip to the Netherlands to see the tulips in April has been moved twice, but he remains hopeful for 2022. Even before then, the couple have a trip to the south of France set for September.

When he’s not circumventing the globe, Jim also dedicates time to the local non-profit world. He’s served as Board President for Nashville Cares, Oasis Center, Greenways for Nashville, Family and Children’s Service and the Richland-West End Neighborhood Association. He has also served on the Boards of OZ Arts Nashville, Watkins College of Art, and the American College of Bankruptcy.

You can also find the amateur gardener working on his home gardens or playing with his Italian greyhound. His love for the breed has led him to adopt six from rescue programs.

Like most of us, Kelley looks forward to a return to normal. Most importantly, he’s ready to get more stamps on his passport. ■



BART PICKETT is an attorney at the Law Offices of Julie Bhat-tacharya Peak where he represents Liberty Mutual Group, Inc.’s insureds and customers of its affiliated groups in litigation throughout Middle Tennessee. Prior to practicing, Pickett worked as a law clerk for the Honorable Judge Thomas W. Brothers of the Sixth Circuit Court of Davidson County and the Honorable Joseph P. Binkley, Jr. of the Fifth Circuit Court of Davidson County.