

HSBA Family Connections:
Highlighting & profiling family ties within the Hawaii State Bar Association

This month's interview features **Michael W. Gibson**, partner at Honolulu law firm Ashford & Wriston, and his son **Noah Gibson**, a Deputy Public Defender in Kona on the Big Island.



Michael W. Gibson is a partner at Honolulu law firm Ashford & Wriston focusing his practice on land title and boundary disputes, administrative agency contested cases, and Hawaiian rights claims. Mr. Gibson began practicing law in 1974 and joined his current firm in 1976.

Mr. Gibson graduated from the University of Wisconsin and attended law school at the University of California, Hastings College of Law. He is a former president of the Hawaii State Bar Association as well as former director and president of the Legal Aid Society of Hawaii and Hawaii Lawyers Care. He is currently a director of Hawaii Pacific Health, a Trustee of the Parker Ranch Foundation Trust and a director of the Hawaii Justice Foundation.

Tell us a little about yourself – where did you attend high school and were you interested in practicing law at an early age?

Michael: I attended Iolani School. Although my father was an attorney in Honolulu, I was not interested in practicing law at an early age. When I went to college my intent was to return to Hawaii and work as a livestock manager for a cattle ranch. As it turns out I never made it as a professional cowboy. However I have numerous ranches as clients including Palani Ranch, Kahua Ranch, PonoHolo Ranch, McCandless Ranch, Haleakala Ranch, Ulupalakua Ranch and Parker Ranch.

What were some of the most valuable things you learned in either law school or in your first years of practice?

Michael: My first job after graduating from Hastings College of the Law was a Deputy Prosecuting Attorney on Oahu. The most valuable lesson I learned the hard way was never to ask a witness a question that you did not know the answer to.

How has the practice of law changed since you first began practicing? What are some of the rewarding things about being a practicing attorney in Hawaii?

Michael: The biggest change in the practice of law since I started practicing has been technology. As a young lawyer I spent hours doing legal research in the Hawaii Supreme Court library. I happened to visit the law library recently and there was no one there. We did not have fax machines, cell phones or

computers. Every lawyer had their own secretary. The pace of practicing law was much slower when I first became a lawyer.

I am proud of having been able to provide assistance to the community through my pro bono cases. My wife often describes my practice during the period of time when we were living on the Big Island as Michael's manuahi law firm. I was frequently paid in avocados, coffee and meat. We even got two horses. Those days are gone.

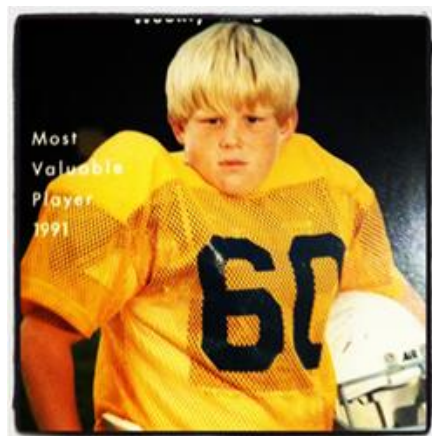
What advice would you give to those contemplating applying to law school?

Michael: My advice to those contemplating applying to law school is to be careful of the debt that you might be taking on because it can be a huge burden. The practice of law provides an excellent opportunity to follow your passions, but you need to be prepared to work hard to be financially successful. There are very few shortcuts in the legal profession.



Noah Gibson is a Deputy Public Defender in Kona on the Big Island. He is a recent graduate of the William S. Richardson School of Law, where he focused on environmental law. Noah is a Punahou School alumnus and graduate of the University of Michigan, where he obtained his bachelor's degree. Noah volunteers with the Hawaii State Bar Association as the West Hawaii Young Lawyer Representative, and Sustainable Coastlines Hawaii, as President of the Board.

What did you major in at the University of Michigan and how did it help you in law school and in your career today?



Noah: I majored in Economics while at Michigan, which I really enjoyed. Before deciding to go into law, I worked for an investment research firm in Chicago and a real estate development firm here in Hawaii. Economics and litigation are the arts of predicting the future, then waging your bets accordingly. Economics and my prior work experience involved the practice of predicting how the market was going to react to different changes in the economy. You study trends and look for indicators that those trends are either beginning and/or ending. As I journey through my practice, I find that the law encompasses and requires many of those same skills. You are constantly looking at the individual facts of each case and applying it to a formula, i.e. case

law and your experience. You then form a prediction of how the Judge or Jury is going to react. Based off your best prediction, you advise your client.

What is the nature of your current job and what do you find interesting about it?

Noah: I am currently practicing criminal litigation with the Kona Public Defender's Office. I love my job and find it fascinating. District Courts are the Emergency Rooms of the Judiciary. You can never know or prepare for what your day is going to entail when you practice law in District Court. Mostly, I enjoy my clients. They have been such great teachers of life. As a Public Defender, you represent the indigent and underrepresented of our society. Their collection of life stories and experiences range from inspiring to repugnant, and each one has a lesson. The role I play places me in a unique position daily to help and guide people during an often pivotal moment in their lives. A defendant's experience in district court is often the culmination of a few bad choices or avoidable circumstances, and the degrees of separation between repeat offenders and those who exit the criminal justice system as better and more productive members of society is often very small. I've seized an opportunity we have on a daily basis as PD's to affect meaningful changes in our clients lives, and that is extremely gratifying for me. Plus, if parties ever get dull, you have a collection of stories that will entertain for hours!

How has your father influenced your decision to practice law? Do you have other family members who are in the legal profession?



Noah: Seeing how much my father enjoys his work was a big influence on my decision to practice law. He never pushed me into law, in fact if anything it was the opposite. He encouraged me to do something that I enjoyed and that makes me happy. Watching him throughout his career has really been an embodiment of the cliché of 'do something you love and you'll never work a day in your life.' The gratification he finds in the practice of law is his biggest influence on me. My dad's ability to be calm, polite, and friendly in a field that by its very nature is adversarial is inspirational to me as well. I have always admired his ability to remain friendly and respectful with

his opposition regardless of the outcome or intensity of the case. This is something I seek to emulate. In addition to my father, both my paternal and maternal grandfathers were also both successful attorneys, and that has given me a great deal of confidence. I was young when my dad's father, Chico Gibson, passed away and I never got to meet my mom's dad, Stan Hoebreckx. However, knowing that I have their blood and spirit in me is a huge motivation. It's my hope that I am making them proud.

What advice would you give to recent law school graduates?

Noah: Graduation is only the beginning of becoming a lawyer, so never remove your "learning hat." Pace yourself, because this is the beginning of a long journey into the practice of law. Sprinting out of the gates with the intention to figure it all and make tons of money can be exhausting and

unproductive. I have had to learn to slow down and be realistic with my expectations, for I have a lot to learn and scars to earn. My first three years since graduating law school included working as a First Circuit Law Clerk and then as Deputy Public Defender. It's been a collection of wonderful learning experiences. Being in a court room has allowed me to see and experience many areas of law. This has allowed me to discover what kind of work I disliked, which has proved just as important as discovering what work I love to do. Law School gave me the paddle, it's up to me to learn how to use that paddle in the most effective way possible. We all have our own boats to navigate and our own directions to take our practice of law, so take your time finding the boat that fits you best, and enjoy the journey.



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