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## 7 People, 4 Lawyers, 3 Dogs and Spotty Wi-Fi: In Quarantine With O'Melveny Chairman Brad Butwin

*At 63 straight family dinners and counting, the Butwin clan is finding challenges and rewards.*

By Patrick Smith

Many families have gathered together to weather self-isolating mandates across the country.

But few could match the legal—and canine—congregation now assembled under the Long Island roof of O'Melveny & Myers' Bradley Butwin.

Since March 13, the Butwin address in Nassau County has been Big Law's "Full House." Along with Butwin, who was just reelected to another term as O'Melveny's chairman, it's now home to Randi, Butwin's wife of 31 years; his oldest daughter Jenny, who is a first-year associate at Davis Polk & Wardwell; sons Alex and Jake, recent Fordham Law grads who are headed to Paul, Weiss, Rifkind, Wharton & Garrison and Proskauer Rose, respectively; Jake's fiancé (they decided to delay their pending wedding due to the pandemic); his youngest daughter, a high school junior; and three dogs: Brady, Bailey and Benji.

The American Lawyer caught up with the O'Melveny leader to discuss



Courtesy photo

Bradley Butwin, of O'Melveny & Myers, center, with his family.

life at the Butwin place, including hot-button issues such as what's for dinner, who gets Wi-Fi priority and how to handle competition when lawyers dominate the family.

**It's been two months since you got this group under one roof.**

**How's that going?**

The house requires extensive coordination and lots of quiet time. Our protocol is to start with a group chat in the morning and find out who needs quiet time and when. We

then see how legitimate each request is—so something like conducting a town hall or taking a test. Then we have to figure out what level of silence they need, like if someone needs to be on dog duty (they get very excited when deliveries arrive). Then we decide which Wi-Fi system we will use. We have two: One is for important business matters and the other is for everything else.

This has worked out pretty well, with a few exceptions. For instance,

my older son inadvertently introduced himself to my daughter's teacher while he was half-dressed. But we have avoided disaster for the most part.

**As someone who prioritizes food, I'm curious how dinner arrangements work out.**

It's been two months. Tonight will be our 63rd family dinner in a row, which could be more than we have had our entire lives. We were always so busy we never had the time. The tables have turned now.

Dinner is a negotiated issue. It's a major deal as to what we stock in the refrigerator. We cook every night, maybe a couple of times we have ordered in. It starts as a group text, and if you are late to the party, you may just miss out. There are a lot of different interests. My wife is the ultimate arbiter; she is the one who decides. It is a lengthy process.

We have a nice rotation when it comes to cooking, where everyone helps out, save me and Jenny.

If we are doing takeout, Randi generally coordinates. If we grill, it is my sons. It is impressive how good they are on the grill. Home-style cooking is my future daughter-in-law, who is fantastic.

In the nonpandemic world, I had client meetings almost every night—dinners that ended at 11, and then early breakfasts the next morning. So this is nice.

**What do you guys talk about around the table?**

My three lawyers come to the dinner table each night with the latest law industry gossip, including

from *The American Lawyer*. They all cross-examine me as to whether certain rumors are true. They know I talk to other law firm chairs from time to time regarding best practices on creating a safe work environment and how firms might reopen. I also ask them questions, like about remarks I plan to make at a town hall. It's good, because they have a different lens than I do.

**Let's talk about challenges.**

**What has come up in the time you have all been home?**

Keeping a boundary between me running a law firm, my daughter working at one and my sons needing time for bar review ... boundaries are important. My kids are naturally snooping around for buzz in the industry. I didn't really think about this before talking to you, but my kids are stakeholders in the decisions I am making for my firm. They read the press, and it is a challenge.

The other challenges, and this is admittedly a first-world issue, are what is for dinner and spotty Wi-Fi reception. That has been a source of frustration.

**You guys are a pretty competitive group. How is that manifesting?**

This is a competitive family. My wife played professional tennis, and my three oldest kids played Division I soccer. There have been very competitive games in things you wouldn't think would be so competitive. Like cards. I can tell who wins by who's scream I hear. We also play ping-pong, basketball and beer pong. I have a standing game

of horse with my youngest daughter. There is also some less competitive stuff like baking, yoga and walks with the pups.

There haven't been any real fights, but there has been some dislocation. We've had two graduations canceled, an ACT rescheduled, two bar exams rescheduled and a son and daughter-in-law that have postponed their marriage ceremony until next year. So, there are real-world things going on that we are dealing with, but they are of course nothing compared to some of the real devastation felt out there.

**What happens when this is all over?**

As a practical matter, just as the pandemic is a once in a century issue, I think this is a once in a lifetime opportunity for us. I would like to say that we will continue to be together as much as we are now, but the reality is this is a really busy family doing things that require their attention. While I would hope there are more family dinners, I would expect to go back to seeing everyone when they come home for Sunday football.

*This conversation was lightly edited.*

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