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He Will Rock You: Miami Lawyer Mark Meland Makes Deals by Day, Music by Night

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Raychel Lean

Before Mark S. Meland of Miami's Meland Budwick, P.A. went to law school, he took a detour—around Southeast America, to be precise—with his then-band, Swift Kick.

An academic high-flyer, 20-year-old Meland already had his undergraduate degree, having skipped two grades in high school. He was also a shoo-in for the University of Florida but didn't feel ready yet.

So he went on tour.

"It beats flipping burgers," Meland said.

As a bassist and singer, he was somewhat of a rare commodity. "I was young, I had a lot of energy, and they were really just incredible years," Meland said. "It's probably as opposite to having a legal career as you can get. Because you're there, you're a night person, you're out very late, you're playing and dealing with a much different lifestyle."

Swift Kick would set up in one town to play at a bar for a week, before moving on to the next place. And they opened for some heavy hitters, including Cheap Trick, Pat Travers, Honeymoon Suite, Pure Prairie League and Iron Butterfly. Back then, rock clubs were "gigantic," often housing up to 2,000 people, Meland said.

"It was certainly a different time. The lifestyle was much less tame then," Meland said. "I'm glad I did it, but I'm also glad I'm not doing it."

After two years, Meland said he recognized his limitations. "I could play with, probably, any band. I was good enough to do that, but I wasn't going to be the star of that band," Meland said.

“And so, I needed to find my star.”

Meland’s family were in real estate law, and he’d planned to follow in their footsteps ever since he announced it in his junior high yearbook.

“Particularly in the arts, to have a plan B is not a good thing,” Meland said. “A lot of people who make it don’t have a plan B.”

Meland continued playing alongside his business and transactional real estate classes and after graduating helped create a horn band called ESQ—featuring two other lawyers and a bunch of hired musicians. ESQ was once a fixture in Miami Beach and played every Halloween at Vizcaya Museum & Gardens in Coconut Grove.

‘Let your hair down, if you have it’

Meland’s current band, The Urge, plays ’90s-style rock in local bars about once a month. Band members include Miami attorney Frederick Fein, an IT professional and another in the construction business.

In 2018 and 2014, The Urge won Dade Legal Aid’s annual Battle of the Bands competition, otherwise known as, “one of the most fun parties of the year for lawyers,” according to Meland.

> “Because some of the parties are buttoned up, right? They’re guys in suits and it’s a little stodgier,” Meland said. “But when you go to a bar and people are drinking and there’s bands, people loosen up a little bit. You see who’s got tats and who doesn’t. It’s like the party where you can just let your hair down, if you have it.”

Meland co-founded his firm in 1993 with bankruptcy attorney Peter Russin, whom he’s known since they were 10, playing Little League Baseball in Miami Beach.

Meland and Russin were a couple of years apart in high school but became best friends when they both moved to Miami after law school.

“Looking back on my life I can say that I’ve been extremely blessed. And one of the ways I’ve been extremely blessed is to have been able to through my journey with

Mark Meland," Russin said. Later in life, Meland and Russin grew so close that they opted to marry their wives on the exact same day.

"The deal was they got married in the afternoon and we got married at night," Meland said. "So there were a lot of people who did a double-header that day." The couples recently celebrated their 30th wedding anniversary, and along with another couple who married a year earlier, they celebrated by getting remarried by an Elvis Presley impersonator in Las Vegas.

"The anniversary was really a blast," Meland said. "And we wanted to also show our kids that successful relationships are possible because we all sort of defied the odds."

Russin said his law partner is kind, supportive and fair with his deals. "He treats the loves in his life similarly," Russin said. "He loves the practice of law and he loves being a musician, and he gives it everything he's got."

Meland's firm has represented some of the early real estate masterminds of Wynwood and the Miami Design District, and in February facilitated a record breaking $21 million sale on Pine Tree Drive in Miami Beach.

The hardest period for Meland was the recession—though, thanks to Meland and Russin's business plan of mixing real estate with bankruptcy law, the firm did fine. But it was emotionally difficult to see long-term clients struggle, Meland said.

"It's not just paper or numbers. This impacts lives," Meland said. "So we certainly had to have a lot of empathy during that period, but we would fight as hard as we could to get people into better situations. You were seeing people who are very smart, very successful, honorable people going through horrible times because the economy got just so bad."

In Meland's line of work, there's virtually no limit to what can go wrong. That's why, in Meland's view, it's best to focus on what all parties have in common—a desire for a deal. "I guess we get more with sugar than a stick," Meland said.

"One of my clients said, 'If you had a superpower, Mark, your superpower is going to be groveling.' Oftentimes, you need to talk people into positions. And you could say groveling sounds like a negative thing, but he meant it in a positive way — that we can negotiate very well. In a way that is friendly, not threatening."

Meland currently represents a client in Hialeah who's transforming a mobile home park into a retail and residential complex spanning four lots. "These are people with vision," Meland said. "You could have driven by it a million times and seen a mobile home park. They saw three retail parcels and a residential parcel."

For Meland, there's no satisfaction in developing his firm without helping clients do the same. "Some of these clients started off as small developers or small entrepreneurs, and I've seen them become super successful. And it's sort of like we've become successful with clients," he said. "We help them grow, and grow with them."

Mark S. Meland
Born: February 1963, Montreal
Spouse: Jill Meland
Children: Benjamin, Hallie and Elisabeth "Libby"
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Experience: Founder and shareholder of Meland Budwick, P.A., 1993- present; Associate, Hornsby & Whisenand, 1988-1992; Associate, Levine & Geiger, 1992-1993.