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Greg Julian:

Remembering his roots

BY SHERIDAN HAYNES



“I was just a small-town kid who was always curious about what was on the other side of the mountain.” This is how OU Law alum Greg Julian explains his impressive career path that took him from Valliant, Oklahoma, to Los Angeles as vice president of the legal division of Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Studios, also known as MGM, one of the country’s largest entertainment companies.

Greg Julian is pictured in front of the Palais de Justice in Paris on a recent trip, which included business and pleasure.

Julian graduated from the OU College of Business in 1982 with a finance degree and OU Law in 1985. When I commented on his degrees that hang proudly in his Beverly Hills office framed with a crimson mat, Julian responded, "I love Oklahoma. It's in my DNA. I have always been proud of where I came from."

After graduation, he began his legal career with the firm Stamper, Otis & Burrage in Antlers, Oklahoma, located about 45 miles from his childhood home. This first job was where his learning-on-the-job pattern began. Julian had graduated from law school on Saturday and moved to Antlers on Sunday. By 9 a.m. on Monday morning, he was in court presenting a motion.

"I don't recall any orientation along the way, but I enjoyed just getting right in," Julian said. "I really learned a lot from my time in Antlers."

After some time in Antlers, Julian was given the opportunity to move to New York City and pursue an offer to model, something he had done on a local level during law school to help with finances. The firm agreed to the leave of absence. After a move to New York and a quick offer to act on television, a whirlwind of acting classes taught him that acting was not the career he wanted. Julian happily moved back to Antlers to resume his apprenticeship. He practiced law out of Antlers for the next four years. He said practicing in southeastern Oklahoma gave him an amazing foundation for every legal position that followed.

"There is no doubt that I will always be indebted to my colleagues at Stamper, Otis & Burrage for the skill, professionalism, patience and lifetime friendships," said Julian. "Those men were great mentors to me. Mr. Stamper [Joe Stamper ('35)] told me 'the practice of law is not a job. It is a profession and you should always treat it accordingly.' This is something I

will always take to heart — and a philosophy I pass along to every law student and young lawyer I meet with."

As Julian approached his 30s, he realized law was not his only passion. Although he had no interest in becoming an actor, he still loved the arts. When Julian was given the opportunity to partner with a longtime friend and former professional athlete to start a film production company in Los Angeles, he decided to take the chance. He respectfully gave his notice, emptied his savings and headed west.

In just four short months, their dreams of starting a production company were over. Julian received a call informing him their pooled money had been lost. He was left with only the coins in his car, leftover from his days of driving on the Indian Nation Turnpike. He moved out of his condo because he could not pay the rent. He had no job, no immediate prospects and no connections in the Los Angeles entertainment community. Since his parents were not particularly pleased with his decision to move to L.A. in the beginning, he decided to keep his financial woes to himself and make do. Driving back home in failure was not an option.

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"I was old enough to know that making your own decisions in life is a privilege, but I was also old enough to know I had to take responsibility. I had to own it," Julian said.

After six weeks of living in his car and relentlessly applying to studio and network jobs, Julian decided to apply for a job he had been told about at a public relations and promotions firm, a job for which he was



Greg Julian (right) is pictured with his late father, Robert Julian.

over-qualified. After interviewing, the owners were reluctant to hire him.

"They told me they feared I wouldn't stay long enough to learn the business," recalled Julian. "I needed a job, so I made them a promise that if they would hire me, I would stay long enough to make it worth their while."

"When I first joined the company, I worked with a lawyer who had worked there since 1938. He had drafted some of the agreements for both *Gone With the Wind* and *The Wizard of Oz*."

Julian was hired and quickly proved to the owners they had made the right decision. After just one year, Julian was bringing in 98 percent of the company's income. The owners knew in order to keep Julian, they needed to put him in the position he was requesting — to become the main contact for all studios and networks working with the firm.

"It was at this point that I began establishing my first solid contacts and friends in the industry," he said.

Over time, Julian was promoted to senior vice president for Worldwide Corporate Development and moved to London to open their European branch. However, after a few years, even the owners agreed he had made it "worth their while," and it was time for him to move on toward what he had come to do.

Shortly after leaving, Julian accepted a position with PolyGram Television. Again, it was a position for which he was over-qualified, but Julian understood where it could lead him. It wasn't long before he was moved into the legal department, where he belonged. After a year in the legal department, PolyGram was sold to MGM. Julian's fate was unclear, and he watched as his fellow PolyGram lawyers were released. He had decided to leave the company on his own to accept a position he had been offered at a network, since leaving MGM seemed inevitable. However, after giving his notice, he was immediately called back and offered a permanent position with the legal department at MGM.

"Becoming a part of the history of MGM was a great experience," stated Julian. "When I first joined the company, I worked with a lawyer who had worked there since 1938. He had drafted some of the agreements for both *Gone With the Wind* and *The Wizard of Oz*."

Julian now heads a transactional team, which licenses rights in films and television series, both old and new, for distribution by MGM. He also oversees the dissemination of library rights data to all offices, in California and around the world.

Reflecting on the early challenges he faced after his move to Los Angeles, Julian said, "My dad said to me over the past Christmas holidays, 'I know that I wasn't supportive of

your decision to move to California back then, but you had to start from nothing, just like I did, and you have built a great life for yourself. And, you did it on your own without any help from me. You are a very fine man, Greg, and I have to say, I could not be more proud that you are my son.' Dad passed away in February, and so, of course, that conversation means more to me than I can say."

Julian has never forgotten how difficult forging a career path can be in the beginning. He takes great pleasure in meeting with young attorneys and law students, many from Oklahoma, who are interested in the entertainment industry.

"I am always happy to meet with young people," said Julian with a smile. "I remember what it was like to not know anyone. I want to give them the opportunity to have the ear of someone in the business."

Julian appreciates the many people who believed in him and helped him reach his career goals. While his future in L.A. is exciting, he will never forget his Oklahoma roots. | SL |

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