Hauptman & Hauptman, PC
GUIDING FAMILIES THROUGH LIFE'S TRANSITIONS
Elder, Estate, & Special Needs Law

Attorney Yale Hauptman was recently profiled in *The Star-Ledger* in Rhea Bernard's "Three Questions" column entitled "A Practice Rooted In Family Matters" on December 26, 2010. The following questions and answers further expand on the column in the areas of Yale's decision to practice elder law and establishing his own firm in the town in which he resides. Through the many challenges of owning your own business, Yale has experienced immeasurable rewards.

Where is your firm located? And what made you select this location?

Livingston, New Jersey. When I established my firm in 1995, my oldest son was 1 year old. I wanted the flexibility of being able to attend my children's (we have 3 now) school functions, coach their baseball/soccer teams, be home for family dinner, but yet be close enough to return to work in the evenings if necessary. From a marketing perspective, I wanted my business to be in the town in which I live, as much of our business comes from friends, acquaintances, etc. in town.

What made you decide to start your own law firm?

Autonomy and a desire to create something of my own. I spent 5 years working for 2 different firms, which provided me with invaluable insight into how to run – or not run - a law practice. I had some very definite ideas of what I wanted my business to be about and how I wanted to practice law and service my clients. The only way I saw that I could really make that happen was to strike out on my own.

What types of cases does your firm deal with?

We are an elder and special needs law firm. Much of what we do involves planning for our clients' long term care needs. Sometimes we are able to "preplan" for our clients. More often than not, however, we see clients in crisis mode. We guide families through what we call the "elder care journey", helping them navigate the maze of laws and benefits that comprise the long term care system. Our advice and guidance enable us to help protect our clients, their assets and the loved ones who depend upon them.

What advice would you offer someone interested in pursuing a career in this area of law?

For one thing, it isn't an area of the law that one can dabble in part time. It is complex and constantly changing. To do it well you have to be completely immersed. The other important piece of advice I would offer is that people skills are so important. Clients expect you to have the technical skills but it is the ability to relate to them and communicate effectively and ease their pain that will separate you from the rest of the pack. That's what matters most to clients.

What is the biggest challenge you have faced in your career?

Law school doesn't teach students anything about how to run a law practice. Operating and growing my practice, learning how to run a business, has been probably my biggest challenge but one I enjoy immensely.

What is the most memorable case you have worked on?

It's hard to pick just one but a memorable recent case we handled involved an elderly mother and her mentally disabled adult child who had been living together for years. Mom had a stroke and needed long term nursing home care. The family became quite concerned about what would happen to the son. They were told Mom's assets would have to be spent entirely towards her care, leaving the son with nothing to support himself aside from his Social Security check. We were able to preserve most of Mom's assets for the son and qualify Mom for Medicaid to pay for her care. The son is now living at home with some assistance and the family is relieved and thrilled.

What do you enjoy the most about your job?

I most enjoy being able to tangibly see the results of my efforts. I tell people what I do is part legal work part social work. I am not a licensed social worker but we help people through one of the most difficult times in their lives and that is what I find most rewarding. I am able to connect with clients in a very personal way. I don't think many other professionals have that opportunity.

Your wife joined you at the firm in 1998. What advice would you offer someone working with family members?

It works well for us but my advice to others would be to have reasonable expectations and maintain a flexible attitude. As with any family, we have had expected and unexpected life events occur. When Laurie first joined me on a part time basis our children were younger and her priorities were family first, law practice second. Keeping a flexible attitude has allowed us to roll with the changes that we sometimes had to make to meet our family needs.

How, if at all, did your experience assisting elderly family members help in your career?

As many attorneys reading this can probably relate to, when I graduated law school I became the family expert on all matters legal. Having put me through law school, my parents wanted to take advantage of my new degree and license. They had my 2 elderly grandmothers living with them at that time. One of their first questions involved Medicaid. I had never heard of elder law at the time. It was a relatively new term. But, with great difficulty, I was able to help my parents with all the issues we now help our clients with on a daily basis. So you could say, my own family was my first elder law client and led me down the career path that perhaps I might not have otherwise chosen.