

# TLL Joam Alisme

[00:00:00] **Intro Outro Voiceover:** Welcome to This Lawyer's Life, a podcast of the New York City Bar Association. Today we meet Joam Alisme, Founder and Managing Partner of Alisme Law. Joam and Greg talked about how Joam made the decision to open his own law firm.

[00:00:15] **Joam Alisme:** It starts with an idea, and that idea evolves to an urge, and that urge evolves to the need to take action. I knew that I wanted to create something that would reflect a culture that I wanted to build.

[00:00:32] **Intro Outro Voiceover:** Joam gave us the benefit of his experience in navigating the challenges he faced on that road.

[00:00:37] **Joam Alisme:** A lot of solo practitioners are afraid to hire because of the potential overhead that comes with hiring help. I knew that if I wanted to grow the firm, I had to get past that fear.

[00:00:51] **Intro Outro Voiceover:** Joam also talked about how giving back to the community is part of his vision, as well as his bottom line.

[00:00:56] **Joam Alisme:** You have to be able to put yourself out there and to be active in the community so that you can get out there and help both your community and your business at the same time.

[00:01:06] **Intro Outro Voiceover:** Opinions expressed are those of the speakers, and not necessarily of the city bar.

[00:01:10] Here's your host, Gregory Binstock.

[00:01:13] **Gregory Binstock:** Welcome to This Lawyer's Life, a professional development podcast where we talk with lawyers about seizing opportunities, learning lessons the hard way, and about what makes them tick.

[00:01:25] I'm Gregory Binstock, Director of Professional Development here at the New York City Bar Association. And today I have the pleasure to chat with Joam Alisme. Joam Alisme, you own your own law firm where you focus on representing small businesses in litigation matters. You served in the United States Air Force, you clerked in the New York State Unified Court System, and you worked with the nonprofit Everytown for Gun Safety, and now you're here with us.

[00:01:53] Welcome, Joam, and we are so glad to have you join us. Thank you for being here.

[00:01:57] **Joam Alisme:** Of course, Gregory. Thank you for having me. It is an honor to be on this podcast. And I look forward to having a very fruitful discussion with you this afternoon.

[00:02:08] **Gregory Binstock:** Thank you, Joam. Some people have a summer law experience, as you know, in law school, and they never leave the firm after that, or they're with the firm for many years before they make a career change. I take it that's not your experience. Can you tell us about your path into the legal profession before and after law school?

[00:02:28] **Joam Alisme:** Yes, absolutely. Like you mentioned, my path was not the traditional summer associate and then being an associate at a big law firm. My path was a little bit different. So after I graduated law school I clerked for a judge in Kings County Supreme Court in the commercial division. And I did that for three years.

[00:02:50] And as you mentioned in that particular role, I was very involved with the judge's calendar. I conferenced cases for the judge. I assisted the judge with trials. I drafted decisions for the judge. So my experience there was quite comprehensive from the judicial perspective. So after doing that job for three years, I then transitioned and worked for one year as a legal fellow at Every Time for Gun Safety, as you mentioned, which is a non profit that focuses on advocating for gun safety measures across the country, both at the state and federal level.

[00:03:30] In that position, I took it on because at the time as you know, gun violence is pretty prevalent in the country. And when I took on that position, there had been a couple of shootings that happened very successively after each other. So I figured that I would join that effort to try to change some of the laws across the country with respect to gun safety.

[00:03:54] I did that for a year with the intention that eventually I would go back and work in a law firm doing a commercial litigation but this time, instead of doing it from the benches perspective, I would be doing it from the practitioner's perspective. And so after leaving Every Town for Gun Safety, I went to work for a law firm in the City doing commercial litigation, taking on cases like contract disputes between businesses, business partnership, divorces, shareholder actions, things of that nature.

[00:04:25] And I did that for just for a year. And my experience in the court really helped me in terms of that particular job because I was very familiar with the key players in the court system. I knew some of the judges personally. I knew some of the court attorneys personally as well. And so when I would make appearances in the court those connections really assisted me.

[00:04:48] And after doing that job for a while, I decided I would start my own business. I've always had an urge to start my own practice. And I felt at the time the experiences that I had in the court system married with the experiences that I had in the private practice arena really worked well for me to start my own business.

[00:05:10] And the timing was correct. And so I decided to launch my practice in March of 2020, just as the pandemic was starting. And we can discuss further how that played out. But that's how I launched my practice. And now it's been going on for just over three years.

[00:05:26] **Gregory Binstock:** Before we get to that, I want to go back to your experience as a law clerk. It strikes me that you're at an interesting intersection as someone who was part of the court personnel. and also someone who believes in gun protection and gun safety. In the news, as you know, there are unprecedented threats against the judiciary, and it goes all the way down in a sort of mind boggling way, not even just to judges, but all the way to court clerks and those personnel of courts.

[00:05:58] From your perspective at that intersection, can you enlighten us on how you read this and how you see those items in the news.

[00:06:06] **Joam Alisme:** Absolutely. It's a very important question because, you know, judges, they are public servants in New York. Some of them are elected and some of them are appointed, but all of them are really people who are trying to do good by the community and trying to serve their role and the legal process. But sometimes they get threatened by people who are unhappy with a decision that they've rendered, unhappy with how the judicial system played out in terms of their matter, and sometimes those people are mentally, you know, not well, mentally unstable, and decide to take matters into their own hands.

[00:06:48] I remember a couple of years ago, there was a federal judge in New Jersey who rendered their decision in a matter against an individual. And that individual went into her home and and killed someone and the judge almost lost her life as well. And so as judicial personnel, we are very cognizant of that.

[00:07:07] And so we try to take every precaution necessary. But at the same time, you know, judges, they have to follow the law, right? There are certain rules and precedents that are on the books that judges have to follow right. They can't just follow their own personal opinions because of safety reasons. And so while we are rendering the decisions, we're also mindful that we have to take precautions to maintain our safety because, like you said, it could be quite dangerous with individuals out there who are unstable and have access to weapons that could do a lot of damage.

[00:07:49] And so when I went to work for Every Town for Gun Safety, that was certainly something I had in mind as well to try to not take away people's second amendment rights, but to try to make it safe for others who are at risk of being impacted by individuals who have access, easy access to firearms and that can do damage to their family members to other members of the community and to public servants, like judges and politicians, etcetera.

[00:08:21] **Gregory Binstock:** I know when I practiced briefly, I always found going into 60 Center Street to be a strange experience. It's a labyrinthine building and you sort of feel a little bit on the outside coming in. I'm sure you get over that if you practice for a long time. But I'm interested to know from your perspective on the inside, having been a law clerk there for years, and now being on the outside as a practicing attorney, you mentioned that you have a different perspective because you've been on both sides of it.

[00:08:46] So I'm wondering if you were to write a tell all book, called Secrets of a Law Clerk, which to me sounds like a bestseller. What would be high on that list? What would you tell attorneys that have never worked inside the court that, you can share with us from your perspective of having worked inside?

[00:09:03] **Joam Alisme:** Yes. And I'll correct you just a little bit. If you allow me, you say it's 60 Center Street. I did not work in 60 Center Street. I worked in Brooklyn, 360 Adam Street and us Brooklynites are very protective of our Brooklyn cred.

[00:09:16] **Gregory Binstock:** Represent. Go for it.

[00:09:17] **Joam Alisme:** But no, I've been into in 60 Center Street a number of times. And like you were saying, going into a building like that, whether it be 60 Center Street or 360 Adams Street or any buildings and courts around the city can be very intimidating for a lot of people, especially if you're not, you know, attorney or a court personnel because those buildings are quite large, they're imposing, right?

[00:09:39] They're structured that way because they want you to be humbled when you walk in there so that, you know, you can prepare yourself for whatever verdict that the judge is going to render and judges are placed on a, on an elevated position because, you know, we want people to respect judges and their decisions. And what we try to do at least in my, with my courtroom with my judge that I work for, we try to make the process as accessible as possible to the common individual.

[00:10:09] When people would walk into our courtroom, if they were not represented by counsel, we would tell them that they had the right to be represented by counsel. We would often adjourn their matter to give them enough time, sufficient time, to be represented by counsel because if someone is in there and they don't have an attorney and the other side has an attorney, that person is at a significant disadvantage.

[00:10:34] And so we informed them that they had a right to be represented by attorneys. And also the judge that I work for would make it a point when we had jury trials to treat the jury with respect, to give them breaks when they needed it. And after the trial was over, we always interviewed the jury to make sure that we got their feedback about the process to make sure that the process played out smoothly.

[00:11:00] And so being a public servant, it's a public service, right? We serve the public, and so we try to make sure that we serve the public in the best possible way so that folks could have a good impression of the court and to leave the court with the sense that justice and whatever that means for that for them was served.

[00:11:24] **Gregory Binstock:** Okay, so you mentioned you started your own law firm. We obviously want to get into that in great detail. How does that happen? Putting aside the pandemic, which we can also talk about, how do you come to the decision that you want to hang your own shingle out?

[00:11:38] **Joam Alisme:** Yes. So it starts with an idea, and that idea evolves to an urge, and that urge evolves to the need to take action. And you just get to a point where you have to take action, you have to do something or you're not going to be able to sleep at night. And so I got to that point where I wanted to start my own business.

[00:12:01] I'd worked in other areas and other organizations for quite a while. I'd worked at a firm. And as we mentioned, the courts and by that point, I knew

that I wanted to create something that would reflect a culture that I wanted to build.

[00:12:18] The type of people that I want to work with, the type of clients that I wanted to serve, and in the manner in which I wanted to provide that service. And so it made sense for me to start my own practice. And it was not easy and as with everything, including the law and lawyers, the first thing that I did when I wanted to start my own practice was to conduct research.

[00:12:39] I reached out to a number of small law firm and solo practitioners around the city, a bunch of them that I knew, and I interviewed them. I asked them basic questions. How do you start your own practice? How do you form a business? What type of entity do you build? Is it a sole proprietorship? Is it a limited liability company, LLC?

[00:13:03] Is it a partnership? How do you get clients? You know, where are you going to get clients? What type of system do you use? What type of emails do you have? So just basic questions about how to set up the business. And then after I, I had sufficient information, I was prepared you know, to launch. And then when I officially started my practice, I made it a point to join the small law firm committee at the City Bar.

[00:13:29] And that committee proved to be a wealth of knowledge and resource for me because it is made up, as I'm sure you guys know, of a number of small law firm owners around the city who've been practicing for quite a while. And when I joined the committee, a number of them took me under their wing including the then chair Ann Wolfson and a number of other people as well, and I was able to kind of rely on them for information about how to set up the practice.

[00:13:58] And I served on that committee for a number of years after that. And you know, once you have the idea to start a law firm, all you have to do, just go forward and everything else will fall into place.

[00:14:09] **Gregory Binstock:** And how did you decide what area of law would be your specialty or did that sort of find you?

[00:14:14] **Joam Alisme:** So my decision for what area of law to go into came quite easy for me because of my background in the commercial division. As I mentioned, I worked for three years in the commercial division and that division is a specialized division in the New York court system that deals specifically



with business dispute matters, including, you know, partnership divorces, which are contract.

[00:14:38] Disputes involving boards of corporations, things of that nature. And I also did similar cases when I practiced at the law firm. And so that area is something I was familiar with, what I knew. And so it was quite easy for me to go into that area. And I quite enjoy it because, you know, it comes easy for me.

[00:14:59] And I'm able to serve my clients because of my background and my experience both in the court system. And in the private sector with regard to those type of cases.

[00:15:10] **Gregory Binstock:** You talked about the culture that you were looking to instill in your law firm, both in terms of the clients and your colleagues, your prospective colleagues. As you started to think about hiring, how did you think about the size of your firm, who you'd be working with, and how did you begin to approach, you know, thinking about the personnel that you needed to launch?

[00:15:30] **Joam Alisme:** Yeah, so when I launched my practice, I launched it with the idea that I would build something that I could be proud of. When I worked at the law firm that I worked at after I left the court system, I worked with a bunch of great attorneys, but unfortunately, the law firm wasn't as diverse as I would have liked.

[00:15:55] In fact, I was the only minority attorney at that firm, but I learned a great deal from the attorneys there. The attorneys were great attorneys. I learned a lot about how to really manage a case from the beginning all the way through discovery and through trial. So I also learned key things about how to manage a practice or how to build client relationships and all of that.

[00:16:18] But the culture just because of the personnel that was there was not something that it could have been more ideal to put it mildly. And so when I started my own practice it was very important thing for me to build the firm with diversity in mind, you know, starting with me, of course.

[00:16:36] And as I hired people to make sure that the personnel that I'm hiring reflect diversity of New York City, right? Reflects, you know, racial, gender, you know, identity and all of that of New York City because that's what they say it looks like. And that's what the clientele is going to look like.

[00:16:55] I'm not just trying to cater to one specific clientele. Certainly I'm trying to serve, you know, business owners, but everybody, every race, every creed owns businesses in New York. And so I want to make sure that the firm that I'm working with is diverse. I also wanted to make sure that the type of clients that I was working with are people that actually want to work with.

[00:17:19] Not every client is equal. Some clients are belligerent. Some clients are, you know, disrespectful in how they interact with the attorney. And so I wanted to make sure that I had the control to be able to take on a client that would treat me professionally and vice versa. And then I would provide the best value as possible because as I've learned throughout my career attorneys perform at their best when they're working for somebody that they can respect, right?

[00:17:48] That's when we perform at our optimal level, when we are working for somebody that we can respect. When there's a mutual understanding both ways. And so I wanted to make sure that the type clients take on reflected that. And also in hiring. Now, when you're hiring as a solo practitioner, it's not easy.

[00:18:06] And a lot of solo practitioners are afraid to hire because of the potential overhead that comes with hiring help. But for me, I knew that if I wanted to grow the firm, I had to get past that fear and actually hire people. And I was able to do that partly because of the help of my business coach who kind of helped me understand the economics of hiring that if you hire somebody, you're not necessarily just spending money because when you bring on the extra help that person is gonna not only free up some time for you, but they'll also be able to bill more therefore. They'll be able to pay for themselves in pretty short order. So that's what I've been trying to do and I've also been hiring attorneys who are within my circle and one of the attorneys that work with me, I met at the city bar, actually, at one of the of city bars, networking events.

[00:19:05] She's an attorney that's been out for about five years and we met, we had a discussion, I told her about my firm and what we're trying to build and now she's working with me and the firm. So culture, you know, providing value to the clients, making sure that the clients or clients that we work with are very important tenets to me.

[00:19:23] And those are things I'm keeping in mind as I continue to grow the practice.

[00:19:28] **Gregory Binstock:** Okay, so I definitely want to follow up on belligerent clients, but before we do that, let's talk about wonderful clients.



What are the kind of things you look for in a client interview that make you think, this is definitely someone I want to work with, both on the case level and the personal level?

[00:19:46] **Joam Alisme:** Yes. So at the firm, we have a policy and I'll make sure to keep it PG here. That policy is that no A holes.

[00:19:56] **Gregory Binstock:** Got

[00:19:56] **Joam Alisme:** We do not work with anyone that fit that description and we make sure to share that policy with prospective clients. So that's number one: you have to treat us with respect and we'll treat you with respect as well.

[00:20:09] Number two: we make sure that clients who take us on while they want to be involved in the matter, there's also an understanding that they'll give us space to actually provide the kind of service that they're paying us for. That's very important. And number three, we also want clients who pay for their, you know, the service that we provide in a timely manner because clients who are late in paying their fees is something that can, you know, potentially affect the relationship in a negative way. I mentioned earlier that attorneys work optimally when there is respect between them and the clients. Part of that is paying the attorney for the services that they're providing in a timely manner.

[00:20:57] If that's not happening, then the attorney is not going to be able to perform in an optimal way. And also we work with clients that fit within the rubric of the type of cases that we're looking to take on. And so if the matter is not a contract dispute involving businesses or a partnership dispute or a shareholder action, we don't take on the matter because that's the areas that we focus on.

[00:21:23] We try to niche down so that we provide the most optimal service and value to the client in those matters. If a matter is not within that particular rubric, we don't take it on because we feel that it will, instead of helping the client, we may end up hurting them. So we make sure, you know, that type of cases are cases that we actually work on so that we make sure we provide that value.

[00:21:47] **Gregory Binstock:** You mentioned a few times that some of your career has intersected with the New York City Bar Association. You are not a plant, but you are a wonderful invite from the City Bar. But there is something else I wanted to ask you about. I understand you're a graduate of the New York City Bar's New Lawyer Institute.

[00:22:05] And I wanted to understand. If you could share with us, what is that Institute about and how that impacted your career? Because I understand that played an important role for you.

[00:22:12] **Joam Alisme:** Yes I was very fortunate to be one of the inaugural class, a member of the inaugural class of the New Lawyer Institute, which was a program that was started by the city bar a couple of years ago to kind of usher new lawyers into the profession by giving them mentoring by organizing programs that could be helpful for them in early on in their career to kind of help guide them as they went along.

[00:22:36] And I was a member of that program. That program was extremely helpful. I met some of the key members of the city bars staff, including Martha Harris who is a mutual friend and a colleague of ours. And I also develop relationships with other members of that program that I still have today, including a number of my colleagues that I work with now.

[00:23:01] And that program essentially was my entree into committee service at the city bar. Without that program, I would not have been as involved. I've been involved with the city bar and likely will not have been able to serve on the small offering committee when I started my practice and the city bar has been extremely helpful to my career.

[00:23:21] I'm not a plant. I'm not just, you know, I'm not trying to push an agenda here, but it's just the truth. I've been involved with the city bar in some capacity throughout my entire career and I've hosted CLEs at the city bar. I've been very involved with the Small Law Firm Symposium. This year I'll be part of a panel where we'll be discussing how small law firm owners should go about hiring and, you know, how hiring is a tool that they can use to help their growth accelerate.

[00:23:53] And I can't say enough positive things about the City Bar. It's a great organization and I'm happy to be involved with it.

[00:24:00] **Gregory Binstock:** Very kind of you and uh, and appreciate it. Of course, we're, you know, we are asking for your time here. So we know that you're a city bar superstar. Let me ask you for a preview about this panel about hiring. If I were, you know, launching my firm and I said, Joam, I'm interviewing someone this afternoon, you know, give me two tips or a, you know, a horrible experience that I can learn from.

[00:24:21] I don't know how to approach this client interview. What do I need to know in, in a minute or two?

[00:24:29] **Joam Alisme:** My advice to you, if you're just starting a law firm, I would tell you, Gregory, hire sooner rather than later. Don't wait. Hire because you are just one person. And a law firm is a business with different, you know, departments different personnel. And if you're just one person, you are serving as all these personnel.

[00:24:55] If you are just one person, you are your own assistant. You are your own paralegal. You are your own associate, so on and so forth. And so you have to start delegating those roles as early as possible so that you can free up your time. The first person that I would tell you to hire would be an assistant, an executive assistant, someone that can manage your emails for you, you know, schedule your calls, your, you know, your calendaring.

[00:25:22] Someone that can take the burden of the admin work off your shoulders so that you can focus in other areas of the firm. Because as a solo practitioner, your time is most profitably used when you are doing client work, when you are giving value to your clients, when you are billing your client. If you're doing admin work, you're not using your time as productive as possible.

[00:25:49] I would also tell you to not be afraid and to be willing to make mistakes because your first hire is probably not going to end up working out well. It may be somebody that it's not a good fit for the culture you're trying to build. It may be somebody that you simply don't get along with. But the key is to, you know, get past that mistake and to try again.

[00:26:10] I've had to let go a couple of people in the past, but eventually I found some key employees that have been really good for the firm. The person with the longest tenure on the firm right now is my executive assistant. And what made her a good fit for me is the fact that we get along well, we get along well, we have the same values and we are able to work well together. She's learned how to anticipate certain things about the practice and about myself, right? She manages my schedule. She responds to my emails. She drafts, you know, basic documents for me. So the relationship that we have is based on mutual respect. And it's based on the fact that we get along quite well. And so that's why it's lasted, you know, as long as it has. So you have to keep trying, hire as soon as possible. Start delegating tasks because that's going to free up your time to focus on the client work, to focus on marketing yourself, to focus on doing CLEs, speaking engagement and networking, things that will bring in the business and help you grow.

[00:27:19] **Gregory Binstock:** Do you take a contingency cases or do you work mostly on a hourly basis?

[00:27:23] **Joam Alisme:** Yes. So right now I work on an hourly basis because most of my cases are business litigation cases. And those cases, they tend to last a while, especially if the litigation is going to be quite active and unlike personal injury matter, where there's usually an insurance company involved those cases, it's not like that.

[00:27:46] Those cases don't involve insurance. For the most part, all my cases are early basis. We require a retainer up front from the client, and then we bill against that retainer as we work on the matter.

[00:27:58] **Gregory Binstock:** Understood. I want to talk a little bit about mentorship. I understand you do outreach to high school students and to law students through your law school, which is a New York law school. How are those mentoring relationships a part of your professional identity?

[00:28:14] **Joam Alisme:** So mentoring is very important to me, and I think it comes natural just based on my background. I have been serving in the military. In the military, as you mentioned earlier, I served in the Air Force for four years. I enlisted immediately out of high school. And as a member of the Air Force, you are taught to be a leader, it's hard to be a mentor to make sure you reach back as you move along and kind of help others who are behind you. And when I was in law school, I was also quite involved in the law school community. I was the president of a couple of student organizations. And after I graduated, I became a member of the Law schools, alumni board association.

[00:28:59] And so I'm quite active with my law school. And it was also important for me to give back to the community to reach back, especially among minority communities, because, as you know, there are not a lot of minority lawyers in New York nationwide. But in New York specifically, the number of minority attorneys.

[00:29:20] Black male attorneys. It is not a lot. And so I think it's important for people like myself and others who are attorneys who have their own businesses. It's important for them to go back and to talk with high school students, folks who are at the cusp of going into the next phase of their life to let them know that this is not something that's impossible, that is quite doable and that they're needed.

[00:29:46] That their presence in the legal profession is very much needed. There are clients who are looking for people like myself to represent them. And they're having a hard time finding those people. And so the more we have, the better. And so I make it a point to do that through a legal outreach, which is a program at NYU.

[00:30:06] That happens every year. I go there and I give a talk to high school students about what it's like being an attorney. And just show them that it's something that's possible for them. I also talked to other attorneys who are looking to start their own practices. I've chatted with a number of my colleagues who've seen me launch my practice, and have seen me have some success, and they're also interested in going the same route, and so they've come to me, and I serve the same role to them that the other attorneys served to me when I launched my practice initially.

[00:30:38] I share with them resources. I could do information about how to set that practice and I emphasize that, you know, it's important to lead another attorneys as you're going along in your journey.

[00:30:49] **Gregory Binstock:** I'm gathering from your personality in our discussion that part of this ability to be outgoing, to be closely connected to your community in Brooklyn, to be networking, to be speaking on CLEs, this is critical to your ability to run a business, to get business, to, to build a business book. Is that right? I mean, I'm seeing a parallelism between your ability to be giving back, but also raising your own business stakes.

[00:31:20] **Joam Alisme:** 100%. It is critical as a small law firm owner to get yourself out there. So like you're saying, it's as you're giving back, it's also helping you to get your name out there, right? So as I am doing CLEs or as I am mentoring a colleague. It was looking to start a practice. That's a form of marketing because that colleague may end up having a legal issue or one of their clients may have a legal issue that I could potentially assist them with as I am doing CLEs.

[00:31:51] An attorney who attends my CLE could potentially reach out to me with a legal matter for a client. So it serves a dual purpose of both doing the right thing and helping people and being part of the community and it also served the purpose of marketing yourself and getting yourself out there as a small law firm owner you cannot be somebody that is introverted and living in the shell. You have to be able to put yourself out there and to be active in the community so that you can get out there and help both your community and your business at the same time.

[00:32:26] **Gregory Binstock:** You mentioned prioritizing diversity within the firm that you're building. Are there diversity initiatives that you've seen succeed that you would recommend to other practitioners who want to prioritize diversity at their firms?

[00:32:39] **Joam Alisme:** A couple years ago, I actually wrote an article about this. About how to increase diversity in the legal profession. I believe I wrote it for the New York City Bar Small Law Firm Newsletter. It was a short article and one of the things that I focused on was a program that two judges in New York County started where they required law firms who were arguing in front of them to bring along an associate a new associate to the argument and where appropriate to let them argue.

[00:33:13] So the judges were trying to force law firms to give new associates and sometimes diverse associates opportunities to be able to gain experience. Because that's one of the key barriers really to the legal profession being diverse is that barrier of experience. A lot of firms don't give a lot of opportunities for new associates to get experience.

[00:33:37] Oftentimes they are relegated to doing document review. To do in this basic work that will not really relevant to getting the experience that they want to gain. And as a result, you see a lot of minority attorneys like myself starting their own practices to be able to gain that experience. I thought that that initiative by the two judges in New York Supreme Court to require law firm owners partners rather, to have associates come and argue cases in front of them. Was something that was a good idea.

[00:34:11] **Gregory Binstock:** What would you tell someone who's considering going to law school, but is unsure if they want to, and someone who's considering joining the Air Force, but is unsure if they want to?

[00:34:21] **Joam Alisme:** I will tell them that make sure it's something that you want to do because ultimately it has to be your decision. It can't be anybody else's. I know for me when I was making decision as an 18 year old to join the Air Force is something that I thought about for quite a long time. I joined the Air Force in 2004 and that was during the Operation Iraqi Freedom.

[00:34:45] So the war was still going on and I knew that it was important for me to serve to give back to the country that had given so much to my family because I am an immigrant. I am a first generation immigrant from Haiti. I moved here when I was 12 years old and, you know, I was quite young when 9/11 happened and that impacted me very deeply.



[00:35:06] And so I wanted to serve and give back. And I also wanted to, you know, experience something different than just going straight to college. And so that was an important decision for me, and I made that decision. The same thing to law to go to law school. I made sure that this is something I wanted to do.

[00:35:23] Ever since I was a little kid, I wanted to be an attorney. I was attracted to the idea of being somebody that could be relied upon by the community, by the people around them, to give them legal advice. Someone that, that could be instrumental in making a difference in people's lives. And so that's why I joined.

[00:35:40] So my advice to anybody who look into either going to the military or to law school is to make sure that it is something that you want to do because both endeavors are not going to be easy. Law school is not a, it's not a cheap endeavor. It's just something certainly, you have to pay for if you don't get a full ride there are loans that's involved.

[00:36:03] So it's a commitment. And the legal profession is changing. It's changing quite rapidly especially with the advent of AI and working from home and there was the effects of the pandemic have changed the landscape of the legal profession. So you have to make sure that you are quite aware of what's happening and that you're prepared to take on that role.

[00:36:26] And also think about what kind of work you want to do when you get into the legal profession, what kind of life you want to have. Do you want to go to a big law firm, which is perfectly fine? Do you want to work in the public sector and affect people's lives in that manner? Or do you want to be a business owner like myself and service your clients in a different way, in a way that's more conducive to your, you know, to your ideals and to what you're looking to accomplish?

[00:36:54] So think about that and then make your decision.

[00:36:58] **Gregory Binstock:** I understand you have sought admission to the United States Supreme Court Bar.

[00:37:03] **Joam Alisme:** Yes, it was an opportunity that I couldn't turn down. That opportunity came about through my law school, through the dean of my law school, Anthony Crowell and a mentor of mine, Judge Whiten. Judge Marc Whiten happens to be a judge that I interned for my first year of law school. He was a criminal court judge in New York County Supreme Court.

[00:37:27] I interned for him and Judge developed a relationship with the clerk of the Supreme Court of the United States. And every year in conjunction with New York Law School, every couple years, rather, he organizes a trip for the alumni of New York Law School to go to the Supreme Court and to be admitted.

[00:37:47] And a couple of years ago, I was lucky enough to be part of that contingent of folks who went up to the Supreme Court. And being admitted to the Supreme Court is quite important. Because it is the highest court in the land. It is the pinnacle of our profession. If you are a lawyer, you know, being admitted to the Supreme Court, I don't think there could be any higher honor than that.

[00:38:09] And so it was something that could not turn down. I had the privilege of being admitted the first day that the first Black female Supreme court justice was being sworn in. And so that was a tremendous honor to be there. to see Judge Jackson being sworn in for the first time and to take in the enormity and the history of that moment. And so, It was really an honor to be admitted to the Supreme Court and I recommend it for any attorney who's interested in doing that to look into.

[00:38:39] **Gregory Binstock:** Very cool. Justice Jackson, incidentally, is the next guest on This Lawyer's Life, so stay tuned for that. Not really, but you know, we can always dream.

[00:38:49] Would you say a little more about your relationship with Judge Whiten and how it affected your career?

[00:38:55] **Joam Alisme:** Yes. That relationship with Judge Whiten played a key role in my professional growth actually. Judge Whiten and I went to the same law school and he was quite involved with the New York Law School Black Student Association and during my time at New York Law School I happened to be the president of that organization.

[00:39:17] And I also interned for Judge Whiten in my first year, after my first year. And I've maintained a relationship with Judge Whiten. Every year we go to his house we have barbecue together. We see each other quite often. And Judge Whiten actually put me in connection with another judge, Judge Dakota Ramseur who is a judge in New York Supreme Court.

[00:39:42] And Judge Ramseur actually introduced me. to the judge that I ended up working for after law school, right? My mentor, my mentoring relationship

with Judge Whiten led the connection with Judge Ramseur and led to me eventually working for a judge in King's County Supreme Court. That, that relationship absolutely played a key role .

[00:40:04] Judge Whiten's father was actually a member of the Tuskegee Airmen and he is very involved in that organization. He served as the president of the Tuskegee Airmen for I believe, like the East Coast Wing and every year now he organizes an event at New York Law School for the remaining Tuskegee Airmen.

[00:40:24] And we kind of bonded over that, over, over the military experiences, both that I've had and that's involved in his family. And in addition to that, we were both committed to the law. We both committed to, you know, learning about the law. We were both committed to serving people. Judge Whiten for a long time worked as an ADA in the Bronx and then eventually became a judge and so that sense of community service is something that we shared. We're both family people, you know, we both have that connection and we also have the connection to New York Law School and to the Black Law Students Organization. We both go back and we talk to folks.

[00:41:08] We mentor folks. So that connection really is something that stems from that.

[00:41:14] **Gregory Binstock:** Can you think of any particular piece of advice that Judge Whiten gave you that really stuck with you or made a particular impact?

[00:41:20] **Joam Alisme:** Yes, absolutely. So Judge Whiten, the most important piece of advice that he gave to me was to make sure that I pay attention to details, that I'm very detail oriented. And that's something I kind of carry over to, from my military service. Because in the military, you know, it's emphasized that you have to be detail oriented.

[00:41:40] And the judge, really, when I would submit an opinion, a draft opinion to him, he would make sure that there were no typos involved, and that I do my research thoroughly, and that the case law that I cited were cases that were actually relevant, and so the judge, you know, his advice that I pay attention to detail and to make sure that I was doing good work has really followed me throughout my career.

[00:42:07] And now as an attorney and a business owner, that's something that I rely on tremendously because as I'm doing work for my client, I want to make

sure that I'm producing good work and that I'm giving them best value. And if I don't, you know, pay attention to detail with their case, that could potentially end up in a unfavorable outcome for them. And so it's, it's very important to me.

[00:42:29] **Gregory Binstock:** Joam Alisme, I want to thank you for your time and having this great conversation with us. Thank you for joining us on This Lawyer's Life.

[00:42:37] **Joam Alisme:** Gregory, it was my pleasure. Thank you for having me and yeah, take care.

[00:42:42]

[00:42:43] **Intro Outro Voiceover:** Thank you for listening to This Lawyer's Life. Opinions expressed are those of the speakers, and not necessarily of The City Bar.

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[00:42:59] And be sure to check out Building Belonging, a podcast that embraces authentic conversations about DEIB solutions by amplifying the most marginalized voices in the legal industry. And exploring spaces others dare not.

[00:43:12] This podcast was produced and edited by Eli Cohen.