

# Over 1,000 Child Adoptions and No Signs of Slowing Down for Gene Balloun



Attorney J. Eugene Balloun is given a standing ovation by the courtroom audience in the Johnson County District Court following his 1,000th child adoption case. Source: Shook, Hardy & Bacon LLP.

It started back in 1987 when Kansas City attorney J. Eugene Balloun and his wife, Sheila, made the decision to become foster parents. Being a lawyer in a support group for foster parents, he was always asked for legal advice and was more than happy to oblige. The legal advice was the beginning, and then he was handling their adoptions, but at no charge.

“Becoming foster parents changed our lives,” Balloun said. “If we were given the privilege of being lawyers, it’s such a great opportunity to give back.”

Throughout the years, he and his wife have taken care of 29 foster children, including two that they adopted.

“As I watched my own kids that we’ve adopted, you looked and you say, ‘I wonder what their life would’ve been like if we had not come along,’” Balloun said.

Thirteen years ago his wife had the idea of creating a scholarship fund from the attorney fees paid by the state. His firm, Shook, Hardy & Bacon LLP, was more than happy to help. The fund, administered by the Greater Kansas City Community Foundation, has granted over \$625,000 in educational scholarships to nearly 500 students who have been foster children in Kansas.

Balloun and Shook Hardy accept adoptions from across the state of Kansas. As Balloun explained, if an agency calls and says there’s an adoption in Hays, Shook Hardy will automatically say yes and call a lawyer in Hays to partner. The firm will handle the paperwork, the pleadings, and contacts with the client, and the lawyer in Hays will take the family to the courthouse and complete the adoption once it’s set up.

“I feel like we are doing a public service, that first of all benefits children and second, kind of secondarily, is improving the image of lawyers,” said Balloun. “The main purpose is to try and help kids. You meet these kids and you know you want to help them and you go away with this great feeling of satisfaction.”

Balloun is well past 1,000 adoptions and at the age of 85, he shows no signs of slowing down.

“I just try to work hard and do a good job and help people,” he explained. “It’s just part of my makeup frankly. It’s like people say, ‘Well, when are you going to retire?’ and I say, ‘Well, never.’”

Balloun doesn’t practice in adoption, in fact, his field of practice is commercial litigation. It’s what he has done for most of his career, and he said his pro bono work in adoption has been a nice contrast.

“I feel like I do a good job of it and I enjoy trying to solve problems and satisfy clients and work out the issues so everybody goes away feeling as good as they can about it,” he said.

Balloun grew up in Depression-era Russell with three brothers, one sister, and four cousins on the edge of town. Like most kids, he worked, having a paper route, working construction, on the farm, or at a flour mill. Balloun said he did all those things by the time he was ready for college. Of course, he got into the cattle business, because his family had a “semi-farm.” In fact, Balloun helped pay for college with three Holsteins that he raised.

“You scraped and did whatever you needed to do,” said Balloun.

While growing up during that time period, Balloun said, people developed a stronger work ethic, and that becomes a part of your life.

“I think having a purpose in life is important, and frankly I think it probably keeps you healthier,” he explained.

For Balloun it’s about where he can do the most good, and that’s where he has tried to focus. ■



Lexie Hicks, center, sits with 10- and 12-year-old siblings who have been living with her as foster children. Hicks made it her mission to get the children living under the same roof for the first time in eight years after discovering they had been separated from each other for most of their lives. On February 23, 2015, they became a legal family with Balloun’s help. Source: Shook, Hardy & Bacon LLP.