Stephen Golan and Daughter Brianna of Golan & Christie

By Dan Rafter

The law has long been an important part of conversations at the Golan family’s dinner table. Stephen L. Golan, managing partner at Chicago’s Golan & Christie LLP, has crafted a reputation as one of the top corporate law and finance attorneys in the Chicago area.

And long before Stephen began practicing law, both his grandfather and father enjoyed successful legal careers of their own.

So that makes Brianna L. Golan, Stephen’s daughter, a fourth-generation lawyer, an impressive feat for any family.

Today, the third- and fourth-generation attorneys of this family are working closer together than ever: Both Stephen and Brianna are now practicing law at Golan & Christie, with Brianna, an associate, concentrating on commercial and business litigation and employment law.

Working with your father — or with your daughter — could lead to potential pitfalls. But the Golans have managed to work out the right arrangement. As Brianna quickly says, there is no favoritism here. Her father is as tough on her — maybe even tougher — as he is on any other associate at the firm.

“My father doesn’t give me any special treatment at work,” Brianna says. “I have to work just as hard as anyone else at the firm. And that’s the way I want it. I have never wanted any favoritism. I want to succeed here based on my own merits and my own abilities.”

A Lengthy Process Before Joining

After graduating from The John Marshall Law School in Chicago in 2009, Brianna didn’t immediately go to work for Golan & Christie. From 2009 to 2012, she focused on workers’ compensation defense at Chicago’s Maciorowski, Sackman & Ulrich LLP. And before that, she worked as an extern for Judge Jesse Reyes and Judge Bill Taylor.

This was planned, Brianna says. “When I graduated law school, I didn’t want to work for my father. I wanted to gain experience elsewhere. I enjoyed that. It was a great experience. Then a position opened here. My dad and I thought that working at the same firm would either be interesting or self-destructive.”

Brianna has now been at Golan & Christie for more than 2½ years. It’s safe to say the experience hasn’t been destructive. In fact, it’s been a positive for both Brianna and Stephen.

Stephen has gained the up-close chance to watch his daughter develop her legal skills. That, he says, has been a rewarding experience.

“I am a tough taskmaster,” Stephen says. “Really, I am tougher on her than I am on anyone else. It is very rewarding to see her work. I’m proud at the end of the day to see what she has done, what she has accomplished. I’m really impressed by her ability to argue, her ability to think and her ability to tackle projects. She has come a long way in what is still a relatively young legal career.”

For Brianna, one of the main benefits of her current working relationship is the way it has brought her and her father closer together.

“On a personal level, this has brought us even closer together,” Brianna says. “We have this special relationship now, one that I am honored to have. On a professional level, it’s been such a great opportunity to try different things. He trusts me more now. He gives me more challenging work. It’s genuinely been a fun experience to work with him.”

Getting to Golan & Christie wasn’t the easiest of processes for Brianna. First, she and her father waited for Brianna to gain the experience necessary to make the move to the firm. As Stephen says, Golan & Christie rarely hires attorneys who have just graduated from law school. He did not make an exception for his daughter. Brianna needed to first gain experience at a different firm.

In 2012, a litigation position opened at Golan & Christie. This was the right fit. Brianna enjoyed, and was good at, litigation. Stephen suggested that she apply for the position.

Brianna had to endure the same tough, or even tougher, interviewing process as any applicant. Stephen stayed out of the process. Instead, he let his fellow partners and attorneys at the firm interview his daughter to make sure she was the right fit for the firm.

“I had some concern about being thought of as just the daughter of one of the partners,” Brianna says. “I didn’t want anyone to think that I had gotten special treatment, or that I didn’t have to work as hard as anyone else at the firm. I had a lot of conversations with my father. I went through a lot of interviews to make sure that the decision was right for us. So far, it has really worked out well.

Once she landed her new position, Brianna immediately went to work. She
turned in long hours and honed her craft. The goal her was twofold: She wanted to succeed at her new firm and continue to build her legal skills, but she also wanted to prove she wasn’t going to coast because her father happened to be the firm’s managing partner.

Stephen says Brianna made all the right moves after coming to work at Golan & Christie.

“I was very proud of what she was doing,” Stephen says. “She worked very hard. She did a great job. She’s still doing a great job. She went through the trials and tribulations of any new lawyer, of course. And she came out on the other side all the better for it. I’m proud of the expertise she has now built up.”

Making Her Own Decision

Brianna remembers plenty of evenings when her father and grandfather would discuss and debate matters of law in the family’s living room or at the dinner table.

As Brianna grew older, the talks became more interesting to her. But even after she graduated from Lewis & Clark College in 2004, Brianna wasn’t certain she’d follow her father and grandfather into law.

“I can’t say being a lawyer was always the only thing I wanted to do with my life,” Brianna admits. “When I graduated from college, though, going to law school seemed like a logical next step in whatever career path I took, whether that meant going into the business world or making some other career choice. But once I got into law school and started to learn more about the law, I really started to enjoy it. The rest is history.”

Stephen was happy to learn Brianna was ready to embrace law. It was a way to get that fourth generation of lawyer in the family. Both of Brianna’s sisters chose not to follow in their father’s career path.

Stephen says he was careful not to steer Brianna toward law. He wanted his daughter to find her passion on her own.

“I tried to keep out of it as much as possible,” Stephen says. “I wanted her to create her own career path. My goal wasn’t to encourage or discourage her from becoming a lawyer. I am proud, though, that she decided to go to law school. I think she has become a fine lawyer.”

Like many children of attorneys, Brianna was exposed to law at a young age. She still remembers as a child lying on the floor of her father’s office and coloring with crayons.

“Those experiences shaped my idea of what it meant to come into work as you were older,” Brianna says. “I didn’t realize I wanted to be a lawyer at that time. I didn’t realize it until I went to law school. Looking back now, though, it’s pretty clear that this career was where I was always going to end up.”

Stephen says having Brianna at the office makes going into work even more enjoyable.

“It’s kind of amazing. You watch this young girl grow into a mature, confident woman,” Stephen says. “And then at the office I’ve been able to watch her grow into a skilled, professional lawyer. It’s been an amazing transformation, and I’m honored to be able to see it and be a part of it.”

The only downside to working in the same firm with her father? For Brianna, she sometimes has to be careful about how often she calls home.

“I might call home to talk to my mom, but my dad answers. He’ll often say, ‘Great. I have a new project for you,’” Brianna says. “I have to stop him and remind him that I just called to speak to mom.”