

BRIEFCASE

UNIVERSITY of HOUSTON | LAW CENTER

SIX ALUMNI REACH GREAT HEIGHTS



LEGAL POWERHOUSE

Jacob Monty '93

As a boy growing up in El Paso, Jacob Monty could look across the Rio Grande into Mexico, his ancestral home. "I'm very grateful for having been born in the U.S. I grew up just two miles from the Mexican border — we could see Mexico every morning from our neighborhood, Barrio de San Juan," Monty said. "We have relatives in Mexico. We always considered ourselves the lucky ones. I understand that my life would have been very different had I been born in Mexico instead."

One of seven children, he learned to respect the power of luck, the value of connections, and the importance of seizing an opportunity.

Monty, '93, went on to be the first in his family to attend college and then law school. He has built a thriving labor and immigration law practice, become an impressive fundraiser in Republican politics, and worked with many organizations, including serving on the University of Houston System Board of Regents from 2008 - 2013.

But becoming a lawyer was the last thing on a young Monty's mind. After graduating from high school, he started working in construction, earning \$10.66 an hour, sometimes even more with overtime. He thought life was pretty good — until his then-girlfriend, now wife, Adelina, informed him in 1989 that she had been accepted to Baylor College of Dentistry. She was moving to Dallas.

"That was the catalyst for me to start thinking about doing something else with my life," Monty said. "That's when I realized I had to go to college, and then I thought that I could become a lawyer. I was determined to catch up with my wife. I wanted to make myself worthy of her."

Monty zipped through college at the University of Texas at Arlington in an astonishing 19 months, graduating in 1991 with a degree in history. He applied to about 20 law schools, ranging from The University of Texas to Vermont Law School. He was weighing his options when a fortuitous El Paso connection and a small windfall would set his course for Houston.

"UH stood out for two reasons. They happened to have a guy from El Paso who was dean of admissions, Murray Nusynowitz.

They offered me a Dean's scholarship, and \$500 back then was a big deal to me. Murray also told me if I wanted to work, I would have clerking opportunities in Houston. He said, 'Jacob, you're going to hate Vermont, there's no Mexican food over there! You need to come to Houston.'"

Needing the scholarship, wanting the opportunity to clerk, and seeking a place where he felt culturally connected, Monty came to the University of Houston Law Center.

"I'm so glad I took Murray's advice, because coming to Houston and UH Law changed my life. I've had so many opportunities that I would not have had elsewhere," Monty said, adding: "Can you imagine me in Vermont?"

Dressed in a blue sport coat, slacks, and black cowboy boots, Monty seems at home in his near-north Houston law office, located in a building he owns that also houses his wife's dental practice. The rooms are filled with photos, paintings, and political memorabilia, including one of him and former President George W. Bush.

Monty originally wanted to pursue international transactions. The North American Free Trade Agreement had passed, he spoke Spanish, and understood Mexico. It seemed like a good fit.

But fate intervened when a UHLC staffer connected him with Alaniz & Schraeder, a labor law firm that was seeking a Spanish speaker. Monty fell in love with labor law.

In his second year, he became a research assistant for Professor Michael Olivas, who jokingly told Monty he usually gave the job to the Latino with the highest GPA but that the first five students weren't available. Monty enjoyed Olivas' wit and sarcasm, and he learned the importance of being an effective writer. Monty also was involved in the



Hispanic Law Students Association.

"That gave me some comfort. It helped make me feel welcome and gave me inspiration. That cultural affinity was very important," he said.

Monty was able to graduate in 2½ years with a job waiting for him.

"Everything that Murray promised, he delivered on: The option to clerk, the Spanish-speaking opportunities, the city's strong Latino culture. It was awesome."

He credits the UHLC administration, professors, and staff for preparing him for a successful career.

"University of Houston law graduates are known for being very bright and hard workers. They also have good writing and advocacy skills — that's more and more important."

Monty established his own firm in May 1998, specializing in employment and immigration law. His expertise includes representing employers in litigation matters and handling labor issues in Hispanic workforces.

He has won numerous awards and recognitions, has helped a number of organizations, and served on many boards. He remains committed to the Law Center, UH, and Mexican-American studies.

He also is heavily involved in Republican fundraising efforts and local non-partisan campaigns.

"I don't really have a hobby, so politics is my hobby," Monty said. "My wife wishes I would get a less expensive hobby — like polo or racecar driving."