

10 Questions to a Media Lawyer: Jeff Hunt

Jeffrey Hunt is a shareholder at Parr Brown Gee & Loveless in Salt Lake City, Utah.



How'd you get interested in media law? What was your first job in the business?

Like many media lawyers, journalism was my pathway to practice. I edited my college daily at Iowa State University (Cyclone alum and Texas media lawyer Jim Hemphill was a fellow staffer), worked as a copy editor for the Des Moines Register, then landed my first reporting job at the Quad-City Times, where I covered everything from cops, courts, and school boards to RAGBRAI and eventually special projects. I loved the work, but missed the mountains, skiing, and fly fishing in Utah, where I grew up. I persuaded my wife, Cindy, an English teacher and Iowan born and bred, to move to the homeland for a year. If she didn't like it, we'd move back. I was hired as a reporter at the Deseret News (now a longtime client) covering federal courts, and was befriended by United

States District Judge David K. Winder, a legendary and beloved Utah judge, who encouraged me to apply to law school. I spent a summer clerking at Brown & Bain in Phoenix and had some lively times with First Amendment and media bar luminaries David Bodney, Dann Barr, and Paul Eckstein. I almost joined Brown & Bain until I discovered that Bodney was lying to me about the great trout fishing in the Phoenix canals. After clerking for Judge Winder, I joined Parr Brown, where I have practiced the last 30 years. Cindy got a teaching job, fell in love with the mountains, and will never leave Utah.

What do you like most about your job? What do you like least?

Keeping my thumb in the news business. As a reporter, I loved the excitement, irreverence, and humor of the newsroom. I still get a taste of that, particularly in the pre-publication/broadcast review work I do with reporters, editors, and producers. I also enjoy the advocacy work on



Newly graduated from law school



the policy side. As a young lawyer, I was fortunate to represent a coalition of Utah news media and help draft Utah's first open records statute. Representing similar coalitions, I, along with David Reymann and other outstanding lawyers in our media law group, led the effort to enact Utah's first reporter's privilege rule, courtroom camera rule, and overhaul our open meetings statute. These laws form the fundamental architecture of open, transparent, and accountable government in Utah. It has been my life's work to help create, enforce, and protect them.

Least favorite: Dealing with the legislature can be challenging. Also, the cost constraints resulting from media disruption mean our clients have fewer dollars to spend on open government advocacy and litigation. The government players know this and press their advantage. If you cannot credibly threaten litigation, you are always playing from a weak hand. We are doing more pro bono litigation as a result, but that is not a long term solution.

How has quarantine affected your work and routines?

It's been a huge change for me. I live twelve minutes from the office by car (ten minutes by bike), so I have never had a home office and rarely worked from home. The first six months were very disorienting. My youngest daughter, Tess, moved in with us after her college went on-line. Our home felt like a casino – everyone was walking around with a drink in their hand and no one knew what time it was.

Highest profile or most memorable case?

Utah has a unique culture that produces unusual cases. During the criminal trial of polygamous leader Warren Jeffs, I led a team representing national and local news media. We defeated a defense attempt to compel a news reporter to identify confidential sources and testify at trial, defeated an attempted prior restraint, convinced the judge to vacate his order requiring a local broadcast reporter to produce a public interest story as a sanction for inadvertently contacting a potential juror, and dealt with the usual attempts to close court proceedings and records. That case had everything. It was a media lawyer's dream.

I was lead trial counsel representing CBS and Viacom in the only case that went to trial arising from the Janet Jackson Super Bowl "wardrobe malfunction." Plaintiff sued under Utah's false advertising statute, which provides statutory damages of \$5,000 per violation. His business plan was to win, then file a mass action and reap a multi-million-dollar payday. After defeating

attempts to take the depositions of Janet Jackson, Justin Timberlake, and CBS/MTV executives, we had a one-day bench trial with live witnesses. The judge ruled there was no false advertising essentially because there already was a lot of racy stuff on MTV. Interesting side note: my client representative at trial was Hakeem Jeffries, then in-house at CBS, now a congressman from Brooklyn who served as a House Manager in Trump's first impeachment.

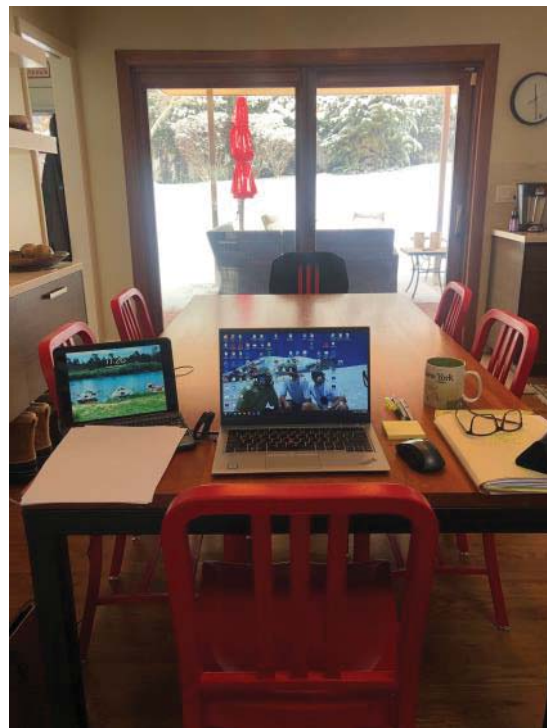
It's almost a cliché for lawyers to tell others not to go to law school. What do you think?

I thought law school was an intellectual feast, but I had been out of college for a while and was hungry for it.

What's your home office set-up?

I don't have a home office, so I set up shop at our kitchen table. Fortunately or not, the contractors arrived at our home in January to start the remodel of our downstairs. Zoom calls and jackhammering do not mix, so I'm back in the office, which still is largely empty. I miss everyone.

What's a book, show, song, movie, podcast or activity that's been keeping you entertained?



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I am currently reading [Abe](#) by David S. Reynolds, [Washington's Farewell](#) by John Avalon, and [Tenth of December](#) by George Saunders. Great reads, all. I recently finished [Twilight of the Gods](#), the final volume of Ian Toll's Pacific War trilogy. If you like military history that reads like gripping narrative, Toll's trilogy is a tour de force. I also re-read [True Grit](#) by Charles Portis. What a great writer and stylist. A couple months into the pandemic, I discovered Malcom Gladwell's Revisionist History podcast and tore through it. Ryan Bingham's Mescalito album is my favorite road trip music, especially when heading to the river.



I believe in balance, and carve out time for hiking, road cycling, and fly fishing. It helps keep me centered.

What's a typical weekday lunch?

Usually a depressing, pre-packaged, Covid-safe salad. In the pre-Covid times, I enjoyed going to Takashi, the best sushi place in SLC.

Your most important client takes you out for karaoke. What do you sing?

Theme to Rawhide, of course.

Where's the first place you'd like to go when the quarantine is lifted?

My oldest daughter, Madison, is a third-year physician resident in emergency medicine at Bellevue Hospital in New York. She had to cancel her wedding last summer because of the pandemic. I am proud of her work, and that of her Bellevue colleagues, in treating Covid patients under some horrendous conditions. The wedding has been rescheduled for August in Sun Valley, Idaho. I look forward to dancing under the stars with my daughter at her wedding.