

From Migrant Field Worker to Big Law Managing Partner—The Remarkable Journey of Joshua Briones

By Jenna Greene

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By the time he was 8 years old, Joshua Briones was rising before dawn to pick strawberries and cherry tomatoes, moving from town to town in California with his immigrant farm worker parents.

He spent his teenage years painting, laying linoleum and carpet, working as a busboy, a waiter, and in grocery stores. He didn't graduate from high school.

Today, Briones, 44, is the managing partner of Mintz Levin Cohn Ferris Glovsky and Popeo's Los Angeles office, a lauded litigator who has served as lead defense counsel on more than 200 alleged class actions.

This is the story of his remarkable journey, a testament to the enduring power of the American dream.

His mother's words have been a touchstone: "Remember God and where we came from. Work hard. Be honest. Help people."

The eldest of three siblings, Briones was born in Gilroy, California to parents from Mexico. He has "crisp memories" of working in the fields as a child. "You don't forget waking up before the sun comes up," he said.

It was California, but the mornings could be cold—sometimes there was frost. "My fingers would be freezing," he said. "But I didn't give [the work] much thought. It was just something my family and I did. We viewed it as something we did together. We

were in the U.S., we were eating and making money, everything was perfect," Briones said. "I never thought about being a lawyer or a professional. It never entered my mind."

But as he grew older, other people—ones who took the time to notice—recognized his potential. Like a man, a regular customer at a grocery store where Briones had a job, who hired him at age 16 to dig ditches in his yard for a sprinkler system. The two became friends, and they started to talk about books. The man loaned him volumes from his home library. And he told him "Hey, you should go to college," Briones recalled. "He said things no one had ever told me."

His horizons began to widen. He was moving around and working too much to get a high school diploma, but he passed the California Proficiency Exam and enrolled at Cabrillo College in Aptos, California at age 17.

He was there for just one semester before it was time for his family to move again. In all, Briones went to six different community colleges before he got an associate's degree.



Joshua Briones.

Courtesy photo

Initially, that was all he was aiming for. “I was thinking I could take some classes, maybe get a job at a bank. I could work indoors—I wouldn’t be out in the hot sun all the time,” he said.

And then, another fateful intervention: his school counselor, Ms. Cisneros, asked: “Have you ever thought of going to law school? You love to debate everything so much you’d be a great lawyer.”

Briones said, “If she had not introduced me to that idea I probably would not be an attorney today.”

He moved to San Diego and met a partner at a small law firm, Swain & Vance, in an elevator. Briones landed a job on the spot doing clerical work for the firm.

To save money, he moved to Tijuana, Mexico and commuted over the border each day.

Another job was selling Encyclopedia Britannica door-to-door. The experience “taught me it doesn’t matter when someone says no. You have to keep persevering, asking questions,” Briones said. “It’s exactly what litigation is. You have to be persistent. Courts, opposing counsel—it can take time to persuade them. You can’t be [discouraged] by a loss or disagreement. You have to keep pressing forward.”

Even if doors get slammed in your face.

Another gig was making cold calls at a brokerage firm in La Jolla. He earned \$100 for every lead that turned into a client. The father of his boss was a lawyer. He told Briones that he loved the profession, and recommended that he try to go to law school at UCLA.

After Briones got an undergraduate degree from San Diego State University, he was accepted to UCLA School of Law. It was the first time he didn’t

have to work while going to school. “I loved law school,” he said.

He earned his J.D. in 1999 (and later, an LLM from NYU) and was hired as an associate at Gray Cary Ware & Freidenrich, which later merged with DLA Piper.

Briones became a partner at DLA in 2011. He also started a family—he and his wife have five children ages 8 and under.

In 2016, he joined 445-lawyer Mintz Levin as managing partner in Los Angeles, drawn by the firm’s embrace of diversity and its “welcoming spirit,” he said.

In a news release announcing the move, Mintz Levin managing partner Bob Bodian called Briones “an outstanding trial attorney” and said he would “provide great leadership as we continue to grow the firm’s West Coast presence.”

At the time, the L.A. outpost had three lawyers. It’s now grown to 12. As head of the office, Briones has focused on team building (his “Wine Fridays” are a popular new tradition) and mentoring, personally recruiting associates Esteban Morales and E. Crystal Lopez.

“When recruiting or working with lawyers, it’s so important to appreciate diversity in their backgrounds,” he said. “It makes a much more powerful team. ... People bring different strengths to the objective.”

What advice would he offer his younger self, or another would-be lawyer? “Keep doing the simple things. Work hard. Be honest. Be patient. Persevere.”

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