Woodward Avenue ran from suburban Pontiac to the nostalgia of the old Detroit club scene.

Mark worked all day as a litigator, went home to nap and then arose to work his second job at the club.

Through his association with The JukeBox, I met professional athletes, singers and movie stars. We had an area for the visiting (professional) teams separate from the other patrons, so they wouldn’t be bothered. The club celebrated its 30th anniversary in 2014. He says 400 people came to acknowledge the bar’s success and enjoy the nostalgia of the old Detroit club scene.

Former law partner and current Oakland County Circuit Court Judge James Alexander says Papazian has always been a likable guy who one should never underestimate. Alexander, a judge for the past 16 years, was Papazian’s law partner for 11 years prior to going on the bench. He has had a chance to observe Papazian both in and out of the courtroom.

“You just want to be friends with Mark,” he says. “Mark was a saloonkeeper and he knows how to treat the customers. He’s an engaging guy who is loyal and trustworthy.”

But, Alexander says, in the courtroom, he’s a tenacious advocate for his clients, many of whom remain his friends for years. “He’s always prepared, and he knows his case,” Alexander says. “He knows the strengths and because he’s so honest, he knows the case’s weaknesses as well.

In addition to meeting sports figures and entertainers in his capacity as a club owner, Papazian has also enjoyed the company of some of Michigan’s most prominent people, including Peter Pestillo, a former executive with Ford Motor Co. “Pete came to see me about a divorce in 2011. I’ve met a lot of famous people, but Pete is the kind of guy I look up to. He is simply the smartest guy I have ever met.”

Pestillo joined the Ford Motor Co. as vice president of labor relations in 1980. In 1985, he became the company’s vice president of employee relations and, in 1990, was named Ford’s vice president of corporate relations and diversified businesses. In January 1999, he was named Ford’s first CEO and chairman of staff. He became the first CEO and chairman of Veon when it was spun off from Ford in 2000.

“We met through my divorce proceedings, but then we discovered we both had an affinity for cars,” Pestillo says. “We’ve been friends ever since. I was a lawyer by training (mostly in labor law). I know more family law attorneys socially than professionally, thankfully. I found him to be very personable in our initial consultation, but in trial, he was very aggressive in cross-examination of witnesses and also with the opposition. He was capable and very thorough. His job was to relieve my stress and cause theirs,” something he did well, he says.

Pestillo, who was named the honorary chairman of the Motorsports Hall of Fame of America in 2001, soon discovered he has a kindred spirit in Papazian. “We’ve been friends ever since. I was a lawyer by training (mostly in labor law). I know more family law attorneys socially than professionally, thankfully. I found him to be very personable in our initial consultation, but in trial, he was very aggressive in cross-examination of witnesses and also with the opposition. He was capable and very thorough. His job was to relieve my stress and cause theirs,” something he did well, he says.

Papazian’s background distinguishes him from other attorneys and offers life experiences to which few others can relate.

“I’m second generation Armenian. My grandparents escaped from the Armenian genocide. Three of them made it over to America. My paternal grandfather died. My maternal grandfather had a 15-inch scar from his head. He told me a story about it, like many men who were in the war. It was never discussed. I have always had a sense of deep gratitude for what they went through (to get to America).

Papazian’s parents were born in the United States and lived in Pontiac where he was born and attended school. He was a straight “A” student, vice president and later president of the student council, active in academic pursuits and in sports like tennis and golf.

“My mother had five siblings, so I had about 20 cousins. I was the first in my family to go to college. Many after me went and, in fact, my aunt started college when she was 80 years old. She’s now 92 and is still a substitute teacher in Florida.”

Papazian represents several clients from Fortune 500 firms and two from Fortune 100 companies. His practice is 75 percent family law and about 25 percent commercial litigation. Although he handles legal matters for many of Michigan’s rich and famous, not all of his clients are worth “10s or 100s of dollars.” Many are people caught up in legal action for the first time in their lives. They are scared, confused and, often, angry.

That ability to completely understand the emotional aspect of family law—as well as the legal and financial aspects—is what separates him from other family law attorneys, says fellow family law practitioner Ann Tolin, of Grose Pointe Woods, who has known Papazian for over 25 years. “When I first got to know him, I realized what keen business acumen he had. He could analyze a business—almost forensically—dissect the information and get to the bottom line of what a business was worth.”

But then, she says, a fuller picture of Papazian emerged. “Over time, I began to recognize his ability to deal with family members. Mark is so good about getting in touch with them. Certainly, there is an intellectual facet to family law, but first, there has to be an emotional one. If the lawyer does not feel a connection with them, they are in no trust there. Mark feels their emotions first and then gets down to the nitty-gritty of the case. By getting their trust, his clients will listen to him when he is making decisions about the rest of their lives.”

“Every circumstance is different,” he says. “There are emotional issues to deal with, like the devastation caused by divorce. The parties are often mad at each other. It is a stressful time, but that is not part of the legal issue. Before we can even begin (to attack that) we have to ensure there is some emotional and financial support as well. I’ve always had the ability to relate to people. I tell them that we need to work on the separation and divorce first and then help the children.”

Papazian and his wife, Debbie, have two children. Daughter Tyler is a graduate school student training to be a CIA analyst. Son Tod and his wife Natalie are in the real estate industry in Denver. They have two children, ages 7 and 5.

“The funny thing is that we had a home in Colorado and sold it to buy a place in Florida. But we wanted to be in Colorado with our grandchildren,” he says. “The family gets together “five or six times a year” for skiing and outdoor winter activities. “Most of our family vacations were taken from January to March. I’m sitting here looking at a picture on my desk of Todd when he was 8 at a ski hill. Now he’s 38.”

Time and his Cadillac CTS-V have a lot in common.

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