

Director and bankruptcy leader Tim Kline featured in The Oklahoman Q&A

EXECUTIVE Q&A WITH TIMOTHY D. "TIM" KLINE

Penn Square Bank collapse sparks counselor's career in bankruptcy law



The morning of the 1982 Penn Square Bank collapse, Phillips Murrah Director Tim Kline — then a young general litigation attorney — was asked by his firm to call on Oklahoma City citizen Carl Swan, who was a director of the bank.

"It was the Monday following the July 4th weekend, and I was supposed to be off," said Kline, who remembers he wasn't too happy about the assignment.

In their meeting, Kline asked Swan if the bank was OK and Swan, in his notorious gruff manner, reported that it was; that the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation agreed to capitalize millions more and give the bank more time, he said.

But when Kline arrived home and flipped on his TV, he learned the FDIC had pulled the plug on Penn Square Bank.

The infamous bankruptcy is what sparked a nearly 33-year career in bankruptcy law for Kline, whose late father and former Assistant U.S. Attorney David A. Kline Jr. served 14 years as a bankruptcy judge.

At the time of the collapse, Kline was helping his dad teach a bankruptcy law course at Oklahoma City University — largely on the 1978 Bankruptcy Reform Act, which the senior Kline had helped promote.

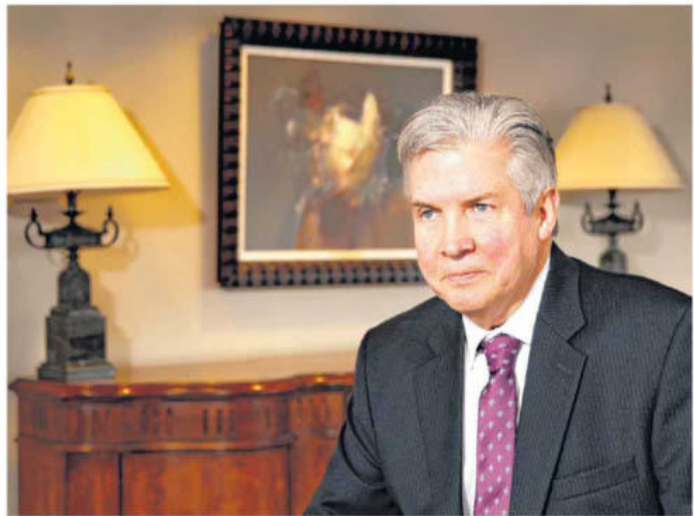
Tim Kline never intended to go into bankruptcy law but, following the oil bust, circumstances unfolded that way, he said. With so much demand for bankruptcy work, his dad left the bench and they formed Kline & Kline in February 1983, where they worked together for more than 25 years.

Kline in 2011 joined Phillips Murrah, where he continues to specialize in bankruptcy law.

From his offices on the 19th floor of the Corporate Tower, Kline, 65, sat down recently to talk about his life and career. This is an edited transcript:

Q: Tell us about your roots.

A: Of course, my father was an attorney and my mother was a homemaker. I'm the middle child of their three children. My brother is six years older



Tim Kline, head of the bankruptcy practice at Phillips Murrah, said his work is really about avoiding bankruptcy.

PHOTO BY JIM BECKEL, THE OKLAHOMAN

PERSONALLY SPEAKING

- **Position:** Phillips Murrah law firm, director
- **Birth date/birthplace:** July 16, 1949/Oklahoma City
- **Education:** University of Oklahoma, law degree; master's in political science with a graduate minor in philosophy; and bachelor's in political science
- **Family:** wife Alyssa, married 29 years, and daughters Timmi Ruth, 18, and Lucy Grace, 16
- **Residence:** an acreage in northeast Oklahoma City
- **Civic/professional contributions:** Downtown Rotary Club, former president of the Oklahoma County Bar Association and past chairman and current director of the bankruptcy and reorganization section of the Oklahoma Bar Association
- **Pastimes:** going for long walks on his property and writing rock 'n' roll lyrics with G. David Bryant, a lifelong friend and Phillips Murrah colleague. He plays guitar and has a home studio.
- **Bucket list:** seeing Greece, Israel and Egypt
- **Trivial fact:** he's left-handed, which was an asset when he pitched in high school baseball



after my brother was recruited there to play baseball. Once he graduated and went to OU on a

scholarship, he was a senior. By the summer of my senior year, I graduated to writing obits and writing some Friday night football

for the Racket Club and OKC Tennis Center. I got to play tennis with Colin Robertson. Before my father and I opened our own firm, I clerked for over three years for U.S. federal judge Luther Johnson. He liked having me in the courtroom with him, so I got to see a lot of good lawyers at work in big trials. I worked the next three years for the firm of Jimmy Linn, a west Texas litigator who was a heavy hitter on the national level.

Q: What do you like about practicing bankruptcy law?

A: My work is really about avoiding bankruptcy as such. Whether I represent the debtor, creditor or a trustee, I try to bring together parties who are in financial stress and help them clarify what common interests are involved and how to maximize financial recovery. My goal is to do the most for the most people in the most efficient manner possible. Of course, like in all things in life, it takes two to tango. Sometimes, people aren't cooperative and we have to

go to a Plan B scenario and invoke legal remedies and be as confrontational as necessary. I'm as rice as the other side will allow.

Q: How did you meet your wife?

A: Alyssa is a native Canadian. We met at Christmas time 1979, when I went to British Columbia to visit relatives and friends, but then she was only a punk teenager. Her family and I kept in touch over the years and in the summer of '85, she called to say she and her folks were going to Seattle and would I like to meet them there. She was 23; I was 36. I spent a couple days in Seattle, but had to fly back to Albuquerque for a big

case. Three weeks later, I flew to British Columbia, where we wed and spent our honeymoon. She was shocked that it was 100 degrees in Oklahoma City, when our flight arrived home at 11 p.m. on Sept. 1. The next morning, she joked about getting an annulment. But this August, we will have been married 30 years. Alyssa earned an education degree at UCO and taught elementary school, before she had our daughters whom she home schools. After the girls were born, Alyssa's parents moved to Oklahoma City. We've lost her mother, but her father lives in a retirement community. He's 94 and was over for Easter.



Although Phillips Murrah Director [Tim Kline](#) will recoil at the use of this descriptor, I (Marketing Director, Dave Rhea) am going to be so bold and reckless as to say he is legendary. As I listened to him review some of the highlights of his personal history, I felt like I was in the room with a great

Oklahoma oral historian.

I found myself thinking on a couple of occasions, “too bad Tim doesn’t have a radio show.” But I guess he’s a little busy being one of the state’s preeminent bankruptcy attorneys. Oh well, I think he could have given Paul Harvey a run for him money.

Business reporter Paula Burkes, from The Oklahoman, was kind enough to stop by the firm recently to talk to Tim for one of the newspaper’s Executive Q&A features. It published Sunday, April 12 and gave people a glimpse into the storied life of a lawyer who has been practicing bankruptcy law since those infamous Penn Square days:

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✖ *Tim Kline, head of the bankruptcy practice at Phillips Murrah, in his company’s offices on Monday, April 6, 2015. For Executive Q&A Photo by Jim Beckel, The Oklahoman*
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Q: Tell us about your roots.

A: Of course, my father was an attorney and my mother was a homemaker. I'm the middle child of their three children. My brother is six years older and my sister is eight years younger. My father used to joke that he managed to raise three only children. But we were, and still are, close. In fact, we three and our mother, 94, all live within walking distance from one another on several hundred acres we bought in 1981 in the Jones Public Schools District in eastern Oklahoma County, 10 miles east of I-35, where we have dogs, chickens and horses. My brother-in-law raises cattle. When I was a bachelor, my home was like an overgrown cabin. But since Alyssa and I married, we've reinvented it three times. It's three-storied and our second story overlooks a lake.

Q: Where did you go to school?

A: In elementary school, I was a Mayfair Chipmunk. We lived near 50th and May when Mayfair was a brand-new neighborhood. In the sixth- and seventh-grades, I attended Casady, after my brother was recruited there to play baseball. Once he graduated and went to OU on a baseball scholarship – and I lost my ride to school – I transferred to Putnam City, where I graduated. Growing up, I played baseball, football and basketball, but my siblings were far better athletes. My sister went to OCU on a tennis scholarship. I was into politics. At 7, I remember sitting up and crying when Adlai Stevenson lost; in 1960, I got to hear JFK speak in the municipal auditorium; and before I could vote, I was the Ward 1 campaign chairman for Eugene McCarthy. I also enjoyed speech, debate and plays. My favorite role was the lead my sophomore year in “Look Heavenward Angel.”

Q: What were some of your first jobs and first cars?

A: As a youth, I worked at the municipal ball park. My sophomore year in high school, I threw the first papers of the now-defunct Oklahoma Journal. By the summer of my senior year, I graduated to writing obits and writing some Friday night football stories. My freshman year of college, I was awarded a scholarship to UCO. My father told me if I took it, he'd get me a car, though it wasn't a very nice car. It was a used light blue Ford Fairlane. When I was a junior, and doing well in school at OU, he bought me a purple Plymouth Road Runner.

Q: Did you always plan on being an attorney?

A: There was a time I considered becoming a philosophy teacher. At OU, I studied under the legendary J. Clayton Feaver and considered getting a Ph.D. in philosophy. I'd earned a graduate minor in it, along with a bachelor's and master's in polisci. But instead, I wound up taking the law school entrance exam. I like the problem solving in law, and helping people where they have a practical need. During law

school, I interned with the U.S. Attorneys office and worked at the Redlands Racket Club and OKC Tennis Center. I got to play tennis with Colin Robertson. Before my father and I opened our own firm, I clerked for over three years for U.S. federal judge Luther Bohanon. He liked having me in the courtroom with him, so I got to see a lot of good lawyers at work in big trials. I worked the next three years for the firm of Jimmy Linn, a west Texas litigator who was a heavy hitter on the national level.

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