



Teach Pray Run: The Life and Code of Hon. Paul E. Singleton

U.S. Bankruptcy Judge, Northern District of Indiana

by Hon. Alan S. Trust



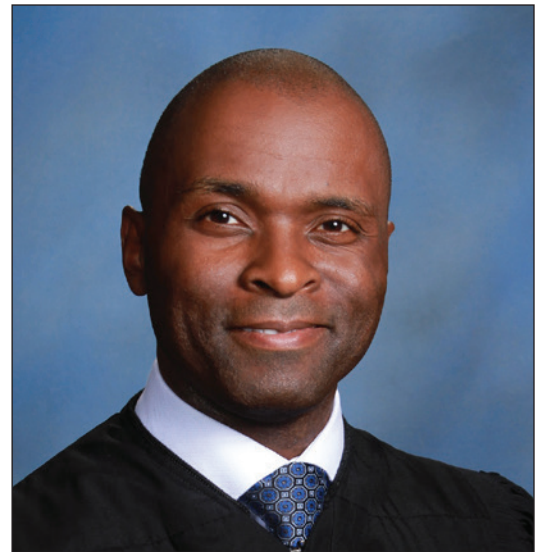
Hon. Alan S. Trust sits in the Eastern District of New York as chief bankruptcy judge. He is a past chair of the FBA Bankruptcy Law Section and served a two-year term as president of the Eastern District of New York Chapter of the FBA. He currently serves as chair of the Bankruptcy Judges Committee of the FBA Judiciary Division, and is the liaison from the National Conference of Bankruptcy Judges to the FBA.

Over the past three years I have had the distinct privilege of getting to know Paul E. Singleton, United States Bankruptcy Judge for the Northern District of Indiana. In early 2021, the Federal Judicial Center asked me if I would act as Judge Singleton's mentor. After asking what he did wrong to be assigned to me, I immediately said yes. I am certainly glad I did, and hope PES is as well.

If I had to describe Judge Singleton in a few words, I would probably choose humble, grounded, bright and dedicated. You know, a real mensch.

Judge Singleton's official court bio will detail his life of public service and his pre-judge-cred²: during 2003-2005, he taught social studies for Teach for America at the National Academy Foundation High School in Baltimore; in 2003 he earned his bachelor's degree with honors from Wake Forest University. He was supposed to graduate from the Sandra Day O'Connor College of Law at Arizona State University law school in 2009, but he and Stephanie (*see infra*) were expecting their first child. So, they did what any expectant couple would do (not) – he took extra credits to finish his law school requirements in December 2008, and Stephanie gave birth during the spring of their 3L year. Judge Singleton calmly now describes that year as “crazy.” Natch. Stephanie nurtured their angelic child and went to class. Judge Singleton and future Judge Steele graduated law school with degrees dated 2009; both with Pro Bono Distinction. Easy peasy, law degrees-y.

Following graduation, PES provided family and landlord/tenant legal aid through Indiana Legal Services. He then joined the Family Justice Center of St. Joseph County where he handled cases involving civil protective orders. During 2011-2014, he practiced employment law at the firm now known as Faegre Drinker Biddle & Reath LLP; during 2014-2015 he served as Assistant City Attorney for the City of South Bend; and, as if juggling a career with a young family weren't hard enough, in 2014 he opened Singleton LLP as a solo practitioner. PES maintained his own



firm until he first earned the right to be called judge in 2015 as a Magistrate Judge for the St. Joseph Superior Court where he presided over criminal and civil cases. Of course, Judge Singleton picked up multiple honors and recognitions along the way.

Some more about his personal life. He has been happily married for almost 20 years to Judge Stephanie E. Steele of the Indiana Superior Court. Henceforth, Judge Singleton shall be *sub nom* The Man of Steele. They are the gushingly proud parents of two children (a teenager who has already audited a few classes at ASU and a tweenager), meaning the Singleton-Steele household is flush with fun, homework deadlines, electronic devices, dad jokes followed by random eye rolling, “are we there yet” road trips, and exceptional parental role models. When his children read this article, he expects they will say “Meh; he's alright.”

Judge Singleton takes it all in stride, perhaps because he ran track for Wake Forest and maintains a disciplined running and weight training regimen. He is a work out maniac. *See Oxford English Dictionary* under “swole.”³ He has technically finished at least one



Top left photo: One of Judge Singleton's many runs; Top right photo: Judge Singleton and Judge Steele at a St. Joseph County Bar Association event; Bottom photo: the Singleton-Steele family

half ironman after training for 40 weeks.⁴ He coaches summer track for his youngins, embracing such tried and true techniques as discouraging them from gobbling down multiple hot dogs minutes before a race, and not losing track of the need to be at the starting line before the starting time.

PES also has a great sense of humor. When he has time to relax, he enjoys reading and a streaming binge or two. Rumor has it he even prepares the family dinner now and then.

He is a man of deep faith and conviction. Earlier this year, we were getting ready to enjoy a meal together at an FJC workshop. I looked at my plate of food upon its arrival and, as I normally do, attacked it with adequate vigor. I looked over at PES, who was eyes closed, head bowed, saying Grace. While I thought I was a quick learner, I made the same mistake the very next morning. Of course, Judge Singleton quickly absolved me of my conduct. He did so because that's the kind of person he is. What else would you expect from a man who had just offered deeply felt thanks for the blessing of his meal?

Judge Singleton and I speak about once a month. I fear that he is just humoring me and that after each conversation he asks Stephanie Hemmert at the FJC when his mentee-sentence will be over. Every conversation is fun and light-hearted while simultaneously PES is seeking to improve himself as a bankruptcy judge and his craft. He

is always interested in how to approach and solve the numerous types of real life issues we deal with every day on the front lines of economic despair and disappointment. He had no significant background in bankruptcy upon his selection but sit down with him now and you would never guess that. Or better yet, sit in his courtroom when he is presiding or in a ballroom where he is lecturing (such as on judicial ethics), and you will reach the same conclusion – this judge has BK game. More important, he is empathetic and a true believer in redemption.

I wanted to title this bio "Teach Pray Run: The Life and Code of Hon. Paul E. Singleton" because I believe that captures him. He walks the walk. He taught high school social studies, is teaching his children to live a moral life, instructs his law clerks on how the law applies to real life, and teaches lawyers in need of a refresher on substantive law and procedural rules. Prayer is an integral part of his life. And even when he isn't out for a run, he is on the run. Whether in maintaining his demanding docket, doing an early morning workout, encouraging his kids to get up to the start line and giving their best efforts to cross the finish, he is always on the move. ☺

Endnotes

¹DISCLAIMER: None of the statements, facts or opinions contained in this article constitutes official policy of any Judge, Court, agency or government official or quasi-governmental agency.

²<https://www.innb.uscourts.gov/content/paul-e-singleton>

³https://www.oed.com/dictionary/swell_v?tab=meaning_and_use#19587561

⁴PES tells it this way: "I get to 69.9 miles of 70.4, and a race official says: "There's lightning. You have to stay under this bridge. We cannot let you finish. Don't worry, you have half a mile left, you'll get credit. You won't get disqualified. We'll calculate what you would've run for that last 0.5 miles." Later on, he was tagged with "the dreaded DNF – Did Not Finish. No time." With encouragement from Judge Steele, he tossed the red flag of appeal and, upon further review, was assigned an official finish time. So, he now considers himself a 49.5% ironman – not a half – although the official record book is sans asterisk.