

Education: Bachelor of Arts, University of Washington; Juris Doctor, University of New Mexico School of Law

Company Name: Akin Gump Strauss Hauer & Feld LLP

Industry: Law

Company CEO: Kim Koopersmith

Company Headquarters Location:

Number of Employees: 1800+

Your Location (if different from above): Washington, DC

Who is your personal hero? I don't have a personal hero, but I am inspired by many people who work to make the world a better place.

What book are you reading? *The Three-Body Problem* by Liu Cixin

What was your first job: Paper stuffer—inserting ads in a weekly small town newspaper

Favorite charity: American Indian Law Center, Inc.

Interests: Backcountry hiking, camping, and travel

Family: My wife, Peggy, and two daughters, Emily and Isabella



The Advice that Set Me on an Incredible Career Path

I never conceived of being a lawyer until my last year as an undergrad in 1998. I started thinking about what I was going to do after I graduated. I knew I wanted to pursue a post-graduate degree, but it was not until I had a conversation with Dr. Roger Grant at the University of Washington's Office of Minority Affairs and Diversity that I began to think about law school. I told him that I was thinking of pursuing a master's degree or a doctorate. He looked at me skeptically, and then asked me what I really wanted to do after I finished my education.

I knew I wanted to return to my tribal community to help in some way. I had only briefly lived there when I was a young kid and had not lived there since. Dr. Grant suggested that I consider law school as a more practical way I might help my community, rather

than pursuing a career in academia. After that conversation, I took the LSAT, enrolled at the University of New Mexico School Of Law, which has a strong Federal Indian law curriculum, and found that the legal profession suited me.

My tribal community is the Gila River Indian Community, which is located outside Phoenix, Arizona. After law school, I was fortunate enough to be hired by Rod Lewis, who was the long-serving general counsel at the Community. I was even more fortunate to not only return to my roots, but also to discover that the Community was an emerging leader among Indian tribes in the area of economic development, and was strengthening its sovereignty by investing in its governmental institutions. Because the Community was so active in a variety of areas, I was immersed in many novel legal issues and part

of a legal team that helped craft creative solutions to achieve the Community's goals and overcome challenges. The in-house legal office was staffed with experienced attorneys; the Community also retained a number of experienced outside counsel. These experienced lawyers helped mentor me as I learned how to be a lawyer.

Representing the Community became a passion that remains to this day. I eventually joined Akin Gump, but I still represent the Community and also represent other Indian tribes to help achieve their goals and face their challenges. I am forever grateful for the sound advice Dr. Grant gave me in 1998, but I would not be where I am today without the mentorship of Rod Lewis and other attorneys who have influenced me during my nearly 20-year legal career.