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BY JAMES WALSH

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Don't try to pigeonhole Chris Ward; you're sure to get him wrong

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Anyone attempting to track the meandering trajectory of Chris Ward's legal career would be well-advised to use a telescope with a wide lens. Ward, who focuses on complex appeals and Supreme Court litigation for Yetter, Warden & Coleman, in Austin, has followed an impressive—if unorthodox—path to legal success. Consider:

He is the biracial child of an unwed mother, adopted as an infant in 1969 by a white United Church of Christ minister and his wife who had been active in the civil rights movement. His parents raised him to treat all individuals equally regardless of race, which he believes is a philosophy compatible with conservative approaches to racial-equality issues—and he was later drawn to the political philosophies of Ronald Reagan.

A graduate of Harvard Law School, he repeatedly postponed a career in the law to participate actively in the Texas Republican Party.

"I'd decided a long time ago to go into the law eventually. But I kept getting sidetracked," Ward says. "Looking at it all, well, it can all only help me be a better lawyer and a better individual."

Ward doesn't remember much about the racial hostility his parents faced in suburban Houston in the early 1970s. In addition to Ward, his folks later adopted his sister, Angela, who is only a few days younger than he and is also biracial. They already had two teenage biological children. But he clearly remembers the family moving from Texas to Ohio.

A toddler at the time, Ward says he never was given much detail. "[People had a] negative reaction to an unconventional, mixed-race family," he says. But, after a few years, his parents felt safe enough to return to Texas. His father took a position leading a small church in San Antonio.

Ward attended the San Antonio public schools until he and his sister were able to obtain scholarships to attend TMI. It was there, Ward says, that he developed an interest in politics. And it was there, he says, that he was drawn to the conservative credo of Reagan—who was heading for re-election in 1984.

When asked if that made him unusual, Ward says: "I've always had a sense that, among my generation, there were a large number of us at that time who were just old enough to have lived through the Carter years and were inspired by the rejuvenation of the country, economy and military that was brought on by Reagan."

Ward would graduate from high school with honors—and many scholarship offers. He chose to attend Hampden-Sydney, a small liberal arts school for men in Virginia, on a full-need scholarship, double-majoring in economics and classics. He graduated cum laude and led three campus organizations: the College Republicans, the Drama Club and the Union-Philanthropic Society, a 200-year-old debating society.

*Fournaris & Sanet PA
Coral Gables, Florida*

He reinvigorated the debate club, pulling it back from disinterest and near-extinction.

After graduation, he taught Latin in the public schools of rural Appomattox County in Virginia, while also becoming active in politics. He took over as chairman of the Appomattox County Republican Party. He increased party membership and helped win the county for the Republican slate of candidates. The bug of politics had bitten.

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He returned to Texas to be near his family after the death of his mother, shortly after taking the LSAT. But, instead of heading right to law school, Ward went to work for the Texas Republican Party. A year later, he was hired by Texas state Sen. Jane Nelson, whom he stayed with until 1998.

"I started to doubt it at some point," Ward says of his still-planned legal career. "I just kind of told myself that I would see where it all led me."

And then his life—so seemingly charmed by success—collided with misfortune.

In February 1996, Ward and a friend were driving on a Sunday morning. Ward was behind the wheel. The weather and the road were fine.

"It was just kind of a fluke thing," Ward says, his voice halting with the memory. "It just went out of control."

The car rolled over. Ward received little more than scratches. His friend, however, was terribly injured. For much of the rest of the year, Ward juggled work with hour after hour at his friend's side—first, when he was in a coma, and later, as he went through rehabilitation.

It still haunts him.

In 1998, he turned his gaze—again—to the law. After graduating cum laude from Harvard Law, where he was a member of the Harvard Law Review, Ward clerked for Judge Will Garwood on the 5th Circuit and began his practice as an appellate litigator. It is a job that suits his drive, his determination and his skill as a writer—honed over those years in politics.

"We focus on the process and the art of crafting effective arguments on appeal," Ward says of his work.

After all the sidetracking, he admits he has found a vocation that seems to take advantage of his strengths as a researcher and wordsmith.

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