

GETTING HERE

We need to spend more time reflecting on the path that brings one to consider a life in law. Where do such people come from? Who would make such a decision? What does it mean to choose law as a career? Does the decision have a history--a story?

Sit quietly for a few moments. Try to imagine the first time you thought of becoming a lawyer. Did someone say something or do something that set you on your present course? What was said? What have you told yourself over the years about this conversation? Do you have a story that helps explain how you happen to be where you are?

Our stories tell us something about ourselves, what we are doing, how it feels to do it, where we are going, and where we should be going. Our lives are rooted in narrative and grow out of it. If we are to gain a sense of who we are, where we stand in the world, what our relationship in and with the world is to be, then we need some means to connect the diverse and multidimensional experiences of our world. Our stories are our lives. To recover our story is to reclaim our experience and to re-inhabit the world.

We undertake to tell stories so that we can discover something about ourselves and how we are connected to the world, how we live the world and the world lives us. Story-telling is one way to articulate what it is that we are living through, what kind of world we are living in.

Our sense of uniqueness comes from the fact that each of us constructs a social world at the same time that we are born into the world. One experience of everyday reality is that the world is "given." Another experience is that we make our way in the world, that we have a "personality," with a distinctive way of speaking about our own experience. We develop the notion that our "felt experience" of the world is personal and unique--like a fingerprint--without equal and not shared, it simply is. And it is out of this feeling of "private experience" in a public world that we construct a story that relates our experiences, our feelings, thoughts, expectations, and fantasies. In the weaving of thought with feeling, time with place, person with person, self to other, other to self, a

story begins to emerge. We have something to talk about as our lives take on depth and acquire meaning. In a sense we have something to share, something to give. And it is in this process of sharing stories that we find curiosity, envy, jealousy, greed, empathy, and love.

Our stories are not straight-forward plots with clear beginnings and endings. We may not even be aware that we have a story to tell--that we are a story. Or we may tell a story that covers, hides and obscures our thoughts, feelings, and fantasies. And there may be stories instead of a story, for our lives are entangled and entangling in ways that make a single plot unlikely.

To understand what it means to be a woman becoming a lawyer it is necessary to reflect on subjective experience, the stories that women tell of their endeavor.

ANN SPANER

The first time I talked about going to law school I was 19 years old, idealistic, an activist, egotist and totally unaware of any limitation on my ability to do or be whatever I wanted to do or be. It was the summer between my first and second years in college. I felt very independent. I had convinced my parents to allow me (sounds pretty independent, huh?) to attend the Democratic National Convention in Miami Beach, Florida, with a good friend from high school, Sarah, who was working for the Democrats. I went to help work. I was pro-McCarthy but "pragmatically" I supported George McGovern as the undisputed front-runner and probable party nominee. What different times those were!

During that week, my friend Sarah spoke of going to law school. Her father was a lawyer. I looked at all the lawyers around me on the convention floor, got treated kindly and lavishly by a lawyer Sugar Daddy from Texas and began thinking of a career in the law myself. Actually, I thought more in terms of a career in politics, with attending law school as a necessary prerequisite. It was so seductive--the convention was full of young and old, right and left, black and white, gay and straight, and seemed, to a 19 year old idealist, so pregnant with possibilities. Change was in the air. Of course, being young and naive no doubt contributed to my sense of witnessing something

progressive and purposeful. In any case, I got the notion of going to law school.

The story of the decision lay dormant for many years as I continued college and traveled. "Dormant" does not exactly describe what was finally happening. There were periods of active consideration. Many of my closest friends were applying to law school. Interestingly, of a group of 5 women (myself included) who were close friends in Sweden in 1973, 4 have gone to law school.

In searching for other possible motivating factors, I believe working before and after college had an impact. Although I was lucky to work in political polling firms, I found my skills undervalued and underutilized. I was also subjected to a variety of discriminatory and humiliating experiences. The work environment stimulated me to look into other options, to try to escape.

Embarrassing as it may be to acknowledge it, I was influenced by a man I was in love with, who broke off our relationship just after he began law school. I recall feeling that somehow it would "show him" if I went to law school. He was always telling me I ought to settle down, get married and have kids (but not with him). So I may have been pushed to apply by some combination of ambition, diluted idealism, practical necessity, and emotions ranging from altruism to hubris.

The time seemed right. I was "between opportunities," as my unemployed friends used to say. I wanted to change my life and strive for something that could be of benefit to myself and others. My family was encouraging and supportive. My friends, particularly my closest women friends, were unanimously in favor of my pursuit of a law degree.

In retrospect, I think law school was an event looking for a time to happen. In summary, my decision to attend law school arose out of a mix of design, desire, chance, luck, and timing.

MARY KAY BUCHMELTER

A few years ago, when I told my older sister that I was planning to apply to law schools, she reached over, took hold of my hand and while looking intensely into my eyes said, "Kay, what are you searching for? Why aren't

you ever satisfied?" I listened to her relate the different things I had been involved in in my 38 years, sat passively while she interpreted a restless nature as an identity confusion, and nodded meekly while she predicted that I'd never find the contentment I was obviously seeking in law school. (It's a good thing I wasn't seeking contentment--law school surely doesn't supply that.) I didn't bother to explain to her, but I didn't agree then and I don't agree now. I don't see myself as "searching" for an identity, but expanding an identity I came to grips with years ago.

I married at a very early age--right out of high school at 17--something that was encouraged and expected in the '50s. (I admit that 17 was still a bit young, even for the '50s, but most of my friends were married before they were 20.) By the time I was 22, I had three children. The following years are a blur of house cleaning, laundry, cooking, and wiping little noses (and little bottoms). At 27, I realized that in the 10 years I had been married, my husband had advanced in his job, become an independent, qualified, respected worker, whose skills were not only appreciated and acknowledged, but were also worth a lot of money. He had grown from the insecure young bridegroom who had to ask for my help and advice, to a strong, secure individual with definite opinions and attitudes, and, at least what I perceived as a growing confidence in his abilities to survive in the world. I, on the other hand, seemed to have gone backwards. In high school I had always excelled--people had looked to me for help with their work. I had been confident and self-assured. Here I was ten years later, with skills that no one seemed to take seriously--including me. Who cares if the meringue on your lemon pie doesn't weep? Who cares if your windows shine or if you've conquered ring-around-the-collar? After all, everyone knows that even those simple-minded housewives on TV--with a little help from the genial male announcer--can solve those problems.

I guess I began to seriously examine my own identity at this point. I thought for a long time that I knew who I was. I was just trying to be the best me that I could become. I had had my roles defined for me. I was a daughter, a sister, a wife, a mother. That's it! I could see where each of these roles had demanded and created certain abilities/qualities needed to function successfully, and had affected me in the process.

I was an accommodating child--always trying to please my parents. As my mother grew older and my father died I was conscious of our roles shifting. I became more protective of her, and she more dependent on me. She needed me more and more--physically and emotionally. With my sisters and brother, I had always played the role of peace-maker (and still do). Our family gatherings were always loud and boisterous romps--intense opportunities for discussion and arguments that tend to get out of hand. When someone got too sensitive, or angry, I was the one who straightened things out, explained what was really meant, and diffused potentially explosive situations. My children needed me to be strong and steady, so I was. I gave what I thought parents should give to their kids--what I felt I hadn't got from mine--lots of praise, support in what they wanted to do, and reasons; reasons for everything I asked them to do.

As each role developed, I developed the qualities and attributes necessary to be successful in that role. Then, these qualities became me. I needed to be strong, capable, helpful, supportive, so I became those things. I thought at first that I was just acting the roles but each actually became a part of me. What I hadn't become was all those things necessary to survive out in the world--qualified, educated, knowledgeable, and aggressive. So I began to get involved in community activities and causes that I believed in. I took continuing education courses in subjects that had always interested or intimidated me. I joined feminist support groups and ultimately I enrolled in colleges and received my degree at the age of 37.

I see the role of becoming a lawyer as continuing the expansion of identity begun consciously over ten years ago. I expected that the process of becoming a lawyer would be an opportunity to continue to acquire the necessary attributes, knowledge, and skills--to make them a part of me.

The role of being a lawyer is a different matter. Since I've come to law school, I've realized that the qualities and skills needed to be a successful lawyer are ones I haven't acquired. I'm not sure that I want to. I'm a great peacemaker/negotiator. And being a parent, especially a parent of a handicapped child, has taught me to fight, fight within the system for someone else's rights. Sounds like things lawyers do, doesn't it? What I observe now,

however, is that to be successful, you must be aggressive, ruthless, and arrogant. None of the things I am. And now I'm getting worried about that.

MEG BAUGHMAN

Why are you in law school? Why did you apply? It seems like a crazy way of taking time to contemplate your life! I applied because I was angry. My dad had just died. I was doing the probate work on his estate and needed some information. I felt I could do the probate and didn't need a lawyer, but I needed a few minor points explained. I went to the office of a neighbor lawyer to ask a few simple questions (willing to pay), he answered reluctantly and arrogantly. The information was not a "big deal." I was angry at the way he treated me.

I knew I could do the work in law school so I applied. I did everything at the last minute. The anger kept me going. Then ego plus the realization that I needed to change my job prompted me to accept.

Why do I remain in school? Well, I believe that one needs to finish what one starts. I might as well learn the stuff, it's useful. It is relatively interesting. Ego and pride keep me going. I don't have anything better to do. Besides if I fail this, I haven't failed a dream. I've never dreamed of becoming a lawyer.

When I was younger, friends told me I should become a lawyer. There are benefits of being in law school. It makes you feel good to have people give your opinions credence. You acquire a "golden image." I like the image. My mom and her friends think it's nice that I am in law school. I feel more in control of my own life with the knowledge I have now. It will make it easier to get a job, for example, teaching. I will also be able to help people by explaining things.

I don't think I want to be a lawyer-lawyer--it's too scary. I might mess up someone's life. It would make me nervous. If I do become a lawyer it will be because I want to make life more fair.

Right now I can't see that far into the unknown.

CATHY MORGAN

The first time I considered going to law school was in high school. I spent 16 years growing up in a mid-western city, going to the same school for 12 of those years, and being educated to pursue traditional "female" goals. When I was 16, I went away to a school in a small New England town. The school had 90 students and 17 caring, stimulating teachers.

While I was in New England, my brother was attending law school in the mid-west. Because my high school made me feel I could accomplish just about anything, I set my mind to becoming an attorney. I knew of no female attorneys, had absolutely no role models, yet I must have sensed the pride my parents had in my brother and wanted them to feel the same way about me.

I'm not sure whether it's fortunate or unfortunate (considering the fact that I am in law school now) that my initial thoughts of going to law school turned sour almost immediately. I saw my brother struggling with his work, and I saw myself as a female--less prone to struggle to achieve a career--and abandoned thoughts of becoming a lawyer.

My mother had never worked outside the home and always had "help." Yet her female version of the American Dream never seemed to fulfill her. I began looking around early for an alternative to my parents' lifestyles. My mother is a manic-depressive, but I attributed her unhappiness to her subordination to my father. She was the one who was responsible for his happiness, and since he was hardly ever happy, it was always her fault. I grew up thinking that if my mother had worked, she would have had less time to dwell on her emotional problems. (I realize now that this may be a better cure for me than for her.)

From my early teens I saw that male career roles in society were more satisfying.

In college I considered careers as an art historian, librarian, and teaching French. I was relatively intelligent and ambitious, interested and excited about learning. I assumed that only the very brightest women in college were admitted to professional programs, and since I wasn't ready to buckle down and spend all my time studying I assumed I would never be accepted to professional school.

What brought me to law school was realizing that a

career could not be attained without specialized study and that the prestige I wanted (from being looked at first as an intelligent member of society and only second as a woman in society) could not come without years of hard work. I decided that if I were going to work hard, I might as well be paid for it. Law seemed to fulfill these two career goals. Also, my husband began medical school, and I found myself competing with him. I wanted to be more than his wife. I hate the stigma attached to traditional female jobs (the jobs I ended up in after college). With my husband's encouragement, I found the strength to do for women what I had wanted women other than myself to do: change society by proving that women are as capable and intelligent as men. I just had never had the confidence that I could be one of the women to do this.

I will be the first to admit that I am emotional. Yet I have tried not to let that affect me negatively. I try to use this knowledge of myself. For instance, I am also too introspective, but I use this introspective quality to evaluate my needs and try to satisfy them.

I needed to feel good about myself so I married a man who feels good about me. When he started medical school, I gave up being a secretary and became a school teacher. I then applied to law school.

Being a law student makes me feel worse about who I am. It's only when I'm with non-lawyers that I feel I have accomplished something. I feel that I have broadened my life. My emotional needs were the reason I chose a demanding, traditionally male, high-paying, prestigious, and powerful career. It is to conquer the career, not the public, that I am seeking.

Women don't decide to practice law, they decide to become lawyers. They have an image of a fashionable woman holding a leather briefcase speaking as an equal to men in three-piece suits. That is why women never act as if they "love the law" or as if the law gives meaning to their lives. The law is a means to an end, not an end in itself.

The generalization above does not apply to all women who study law, but I would venture that it applies to those women who were brought up to be housewives, whose families had enough money to educate them through college or graduate school, whose undergraduate or graduate training gave them a taste for responsibility and independence, and whose mothers were not happy being

housewives. (Did I leave out the fact that these women also were never successful at being beauty queens?) I think women choose the law for emotional reasons and not for the search of an ideal.

SUSAN DALPORTO

The 1960s had a dramatic effect on my life. For the first time, I began questioning government policies and the inequities of our system. To that point in my life I had been the traditional middle-class housewife and mother. I believed in my country. I remember vividly my brother, who was in college at the time, explaining to me the United States' involvement in Viet Nam and the atrocities which were occurring. I courageously and unthinkingly responded, "My country right or wrong!" My brother must have been appalled by my level of consciousness and probably thought I was a lost cause. However, he had planted a seed. Little did he know that this conversation was the beginning of hard-headed, conservative, uninformed sister's road to radicalism. I joined the war resistance, marched in the streets, joined the Young Socialist Alliance, sold radical newspapers on the street, divorced my husband, dropped out and lived communally on a mountain top with 9 other similarly frustrated and radical persons. I entered college to join the ranks of social workers who would save the world. Finally, I entered law school.

At the time I was becoming aware of the illusion of the American dream, I was becoming aware of women's roles. This was the hardest and most painful time of my life. I began reading, talking with women, listening, analyzing, and questioning. The ultimate question kept haunting me--Who am I? The question is especially difficult for a woman who has always defined herself, her wants, her needs, and even her name by her relationship to others.

I began feeling the joy and freedom of being a liberated woman. I was aware of the inequities of the world. I was disillusioned with my government and I had dropped out. I decided to drop in. I went back to college and earned a degree in social work. I worked at the Welfare Department and helped treat the symptoms of social, cultural, and governmental disease. It did not take long to

realize that this was not the right career. I looked for a role that would help me change our system.

My degree in social work qualified me to earn a salary just barely above the poverty level. Another reason I decided on a legal career is the cold cash. When I lived on the mountain top I experienced poverty first-hand. There is nothing noble or romantic in being poor. Poverty sucks! I like the idea of being able to make enough money on a part-time basis to support myself.

I also have a strong desire to protect myself, my family, and friends. I have experienced intimidation by lawyers hired by high-powered corporations and persons. The law was very complex and mysterious to me, and I have seen it's complexity used to take advantage of people. As a lawyer, I can be of service--which satisfies my altruistic nature--and I'll be able to earn a living, which keeps the wolf from the door.

Before entering law school, I lived through it vicariously with my ex-husband. My father is an attorney, although he practiced law for only two years when I was a small child. Freud would look at my male role models and suggest that I have penis envy. It is not their penises which I covet, but their law degrees.

My father never encouraged or discouraged me to become a lawyer. He never entertained the idea. I informed him of my decision after it was made. I knew he would be proud of me and see it as a wise decision.

My mother has a college degree. She never wanted to be a lawyer, but was always vocal in her beliefs and an advocate for those she thought were discriminated against.

SUSAN SPENCER

As a young girl, I received different signals from my parents concerning what I should "be" when I grew up. My father was preoccupied and often distant. He seemed able to express himself to my brothers and me only by lecturing or quizzing. He rarely spoke of feelings. I often felt that his love for us was conditioned on what we accomplished. His real ambitions seemed to concern my brothers. It was cute when I answered one of his "College Bowl" questions correctly--but not earth shattering. There were times when he seemed genuinely proud of me; others when he seemed

not to care what I did with my life. I know now how ambivalent his feelings are towards women. He admires yet fears strong women. All my life I have unconsciously tried to please him, to gain the respect reserved for my brothers. I wanted to prove to him that I got some of his genes, too--that I am smart and capable.

My mother was and is wonderful. She has been the living force within me. She has never been particularly career-oriented, yet she has always loved me as I am, and has supported whatever path I have chosen.

I was a quiet girl, even shy, except with family or friends. I tended to please others in order to avoid conflict. I felt that would keep everyone, including myself, happy. I avoided being in the limelight. That was due to fear and preference.

I met Ron when I was 18. I had never had a close relationship before and was, in many ways, naive. He urged me to be more active, to speak my mind, to do things I wanted to do. He had a profound influence on me. I began to believe in my own capabilities.

When I graduated from college, I was still unsure of what I wanted to do. My father had always wanted me to be a nurse. I was a woman pulled in two directions. One part was satisfied with the idea of having a quiet, non-assuming life, a garden, a house surrounded by animals and children. Another part of me wanted more--and even disliked ~~the~~ non-ambitious side. I was torn between my mother's satisfying non-career activities and my father's hard-driving professional pursuits. I considered a Ph.D program in physiology, but quickly changed my mind when shown the machines by which live cats are held in place for experiments. I considered medicine, but was fearful of devoting my life to a pursuit that required one to give up so many other things.

Sexism has had a great part in shaping of life. It has served as both a driving force and a restraint, a means of ambition and of self-depreciation. Sexism has also ensured that I've kept a foot in both the masculine and feminine worlds. But rather than having a meaningful involvement with either world, I have, because of sexism, tried to accommodate both to the fullest, leaving the masculine and the feminine, and myself, empty of meaning.

Even when I was a child, I noticed sexism in the world around me. While my father left each day for some

seemingly exciting world, my mother stayed home with us. My parents treated me differently from my brothers. My father excluded me from the male world. My mother expected me to be feminine and help around the house. At school my physical strength and tomboyishness were looked upon with ambiguity. I received subtle messages that it was all right to be that way for now, but sooner or later I'd be expected to blossom into a woman. The messages I received from home and school unwittingly instilled a driving force in me. I felt it was unfair that I was treated differently from my brothers and male classmates. I knew that I was just as good as they were. So I became determined to somehow "show" everyone. Thus when my father made plans with my brothers that excluded me, I persisted--even if I wasn't interested in the plans themselves. I helped my mother when asked but I always talked of what I wanted to do. It was not enough just to be a good and strong person. I felt I needed conventional success. I had to do well in school, go to college, and select a career. Sexism thus drove me to please others, particularly my father. And I drove myself relentlessly, never realizing why, never stopping to think of what I really wanted to do.

At the same time, sexism sapped my forward energy. Having for years received the message that as a woman I was inferior to men, I often allowed feelings of inferiority to invade my being. While I drove myself, I continually told myself that I'd never make it, that I lacked what others had. It was an odd and terribly contradictory combination. It was as if I were striving forward on one leg. I wouldn't allow myself the power to succeed, yet told myself that I was worthless unless I did. How could I win?

Sexism has also held me to traditional expectations of myself. I am guilty of some of the thoughts I so abhor in others. When people come over and the house is a mess, I feel embarrassed, as if cleaning is my responsibility. I often find myself thanking my husband when he does the dishes--as if he were helping me with my job.

The result of all of these manifestations of sexism in my life has been a split within my self. There is a Susan that is terribly ambitious, yet a part of me that hangs back in fear. There is a part of me that longs to be free and spontaneous, yet a "responsible" part, too, that continuously tolls the bell of duty. It's amazing to me that

all those parts can be in the same person.

A year or so before I came to law school, I began to get restless. It wasn't the sort of restlessness I'd had before. I wasn't driven to find myself, or to cut down what I saw already there. I was simply dissatisfied that my life no longer seemed to have any direction.

I began working at a bank to support Ron when he started law school. I was shocked at how women were treated by the officers and the president (all men). I had never been treated like a "nothing" before. I couldn't believe how my fellow female workers accepted the situation.

I realized I had become an automaton at the bank and had dulled my senses so much it was all I could do to get home just to collapse in a tired heap at the end of each day. On the job, I had given up complaining about general conditions, finding it did little good. I wasn't reading as much, and I was losing touch with the world. I merely worked, came home, cooked and cleaned, watched an hour of television, then went to bed. I was dull; my life was dull. I began to plan, to decide what I wanted my future to be. I decided what would be good for me as a person. Although I still hoped perhaps to find meaning, I was more rational in my striving. My life was more complicated. I had a husband with his own needs and demands. But the change in me was not only due to an increased complexity in my life. I had gone through the self-acceptance phase, separating me from the emotional searching I had gone through before. Now I was looking at myself as I was, with clear, rather than rose-colored, glasses. I knew I needed work with power, to get me more involved with the world around me. I felt I needed to become stronger in some sense; to live my life doing, perhaps for strangers, but no longer simply for those I loved. I decided to go to law school.

I began to yearn for power. I wanted to have control over my own life, to be able to initiate change. I wanted to be in a profession of strength. Again this was partly due to what I perceived as my own weakness: my happiness in merely being at home. I needed something that would allow, even require, me to be tough, yet give me space for other things in my life.

I remember a day when Ron and I were driving home from the bank. I was physically exhausted and felt mentally

dead. He suggested that I go to law school. Even though I had vicariously shared law school when he was a student, the idea of my going to law school had never occurred to me. The idea began to make sense. It would give me the power to change my own life and that of others. It would force me out of the garden and into the public arena. There was nothing to lose.

I was attracted to law school for many reasons, but one of those was that it appeared to represent the epitome of success. By being a lawyer, I would automatically be a successful person, whether or not in fact I was. It was a way to satisfy both my driven and my hesitant sides. There would be plenty of work to immerse myself in. At the same time, people in my family and the world at large would consider me important even if I in fact felt inferior. I could hide behind my status and also find a means of power to combat the sexism that I had experienced in the world. I could help women to help themselves, and by my station or title, I could make men realize that women can be smart and capable.

CHRISTY FARRIS

The first time I thought of coming to law school. Hmm. It seems in retrospect, that it was always in the back of my mind. The legal profession represented independence, and freedom seemed important to me. I did not want to be shackled by anyone else's idea of perfection, and I equate being an employee to being chained.

I like people and have always found myself in a counselling position. My undergraduate degree is in psychology, which is only fitting, and, initially, my goal was to be a psychiatrist.

In high school I remember a couple of local attorneys making a presentation on the merits of a legal career, inviting anyone who was interested to begin meeting with them on a regular basis. With visions of Clarence Darrow dancing in my head, I joined their little group and visited the state Supreme Court, the judges' chambers, the county jail, and the prosecutor's office. I was shown the real hallways where men walked, talked, and made decisions about our lives.

When I decided to pursue psychology, law receded into the background. It surfaced again when I found myself as a primary housecounselor in a northern Virginia group home for schizophrenics, dealing with institutional commitment. And again, when I founded the West Virginia chapter of the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation and was offered office space in a suite where I was the only non-attorney and the only woman. I guess, all in all, I was "meant" to eventually end up in law. With every major turn in my life, the law has confronted, affected, and influenced me.

In this swampland of ramblings, I have not been able to pinpoint just exactly when I made the decision to enter law school. I can recall different times in my life when I have been told "You'd make a great lawyer" or "You're so argumentative, why don't you become a lawyer?". But I can't nail down just when I realized it was a real, viable alternative.

The most vivid memory I have concerning my choice involves a reaffirmation of my decision. The lawyer who donated office space for the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation is one of the most influential people in my life. In a sense, he is a mentor. He tried to talk me out of coming here. He is cynical, pessimistic, overtly chauvinistic, covertly feminist, insightful, and articulate. In one particularly memorable conversation, he sought to convey the sense of helplessness, the ingratitude, the pressure, the torment that accompanies this profession. He was the first to tell me that there is no justice, just the law. And he helped me see why. He ver-bally showed me the Bleeker Streets, the alleys, and the dereliction that haunts the practice of law. He stripped me of my idealism and clothed me with reality. I still can't tell you why that conversation instilled me with determination but it did. Maybe it's because I've always been a sucker for a challenge.

MICHELE WIDMER

I thought about law school as I was growing up. I don't remember when it first occurred to me. Perhaps it was in junior high at the height of my insecurity. Sometime during those terrible three years I informed my parents, teachers, and peers that I wanted to go to law school. I recall the fact that all my friends wanted to be elementary school teachers, speech therapists, and dental hygienists. I had set higher goals for myself. I wanted to be an attorney.

Now, as I look back on the choice, the reasons seem obvious. I wanted power, respect, and to have a sense of importance. As an attorney, I felt I could achieve all of these. At that tender age, I felt extremely awkward and insecure about my looks and about myself as a woman. I dreamed of being sleek and confident. I wanted to hold my head high with independence and self-assurance, like the attorneys on TV. The fact that law was thought of as mainly a man's profession did not discourage me. In fact, that propelled me. For a woman, the legal profession would be a challenge and an adventure.

My parents are both business people. Neither had the benefit of a college education, let alone the dream of going to law school. As the oldest of their three daughters, I was always encouraged in all I sought after. So, when my dream of going to law school came true, it also came true for my family.

FRANCES HUGHES

I have always had the desire to express my opinions and articulate my experiences. When I was twelve years old, I used poetry as a therapeutic tool, to work on identity and awareness. I wanted everybody to know how I felt and wanted feedback on my poetry, so I would read my poetry to anybody who would listen. Strangely enough, people would say, perhaps because I was scholarly, that I should be a lawyer.

At that time, being a lawyer meant status, money, and being different from my mother and other women. But just imagining myself as a lawyer seemed an unobtainable dream.

In high school, I read an F. Lee Bailey book which

made me realize that a lawyer has access to power and allows one to effect change. I am not a passive individual, and when I perceive something as wrong my first reaction is to ask how the situation can be corrected. But being a lawyer was elusive as a butterfly.

My mother did not want me to go to college. She had not completed the 7th grade, but had become a successful career woman. To Mother, college meant a better job and since she had a good job without college, college was superfluous.

When I was very young, I loved to read and learn, and believed that knowledge was intrinsically valuable. I remember a card table I set up in my bedroom with my books circling the perimeter of the table. I felt such pleasure just sitting at the table, studying, and constantly rearranging my books. I spent every penny my grandmother or mother gave me buying books.

I knew I was going to college; I was going to be different from Mother. I remember challenging my mother when I told her I was taking the ACT for college. Finally, after receiving a high score, my mother acquiesced and agreed that I could go to school, but only nursing school.

After attending nursing school for a year, I quit and told my mother that I wanted all the money I received monthly from social security sent to me and that I was going to work my way through school. During my college years, I did not have a definite career goal. I find this amazing. I thought I could slide until somebody would rescue me.

During my last year of college, I met a man who gave me an invaluable education. We had the classical relationship--great philosophical discussions, read poetry to each other, traveled, and eventually married.

Upon completing my degree, we moved to Nashville, Tennessee, to work in a theatre company, and I grew restless. It seemed all our decisions were based upon furthering his career, and I was envious. I was becoming like a million other women. I wanted to be different. At the suggestion of a friend who knew I was interested in the dynamics of relationships and needed to rid myself of a lot of emotional baggage, I entered a masters program in counseling. After obtaining my degree, I knew I did not want a career in counseling, but felt more integrated and realized that law school was a possibility.

I did not have the stamina to endure another three years of school, so I decided to leave the ivy tower. My marriage ended for much the same reasons as expressed by Nora in Ibsen's Doll House:

You have always been so kind to me. But our home has been nothing but a playroom. I have been your doll wife. I thought it great fun when you played with me, just as that is what our marriage has been.

How am I fitted to bring up the children . . . There is another task I must undertake first. I must try and educate myself--you are not the man to help me in that. I must do that for myself. And that is why I am going to leave you now. I must stand quite alone if I am to understand myself and everything around me. I believe that before all else I am a reasonable human being, just as you are, but I can't content myself with what most people say or with what is found in books. I must think over things for myself and get to understand them.

I took the first job I was offered. My professional life soon became a problem. I had no credibility with male colleagues. At teacher training sessions my opinions regarding education were not considered valid. I constantly had to prove myself. My growing inferiority complex led me to become defensive. The continual dismissal of my thoughts and opinions prompted me to once again consider law school. I wanted credibility.

After three years, I was bored with my job and needed a change. I came to law school because I wanted a change that would give me even more economic independence, credibility, status, flexibility in a career choice, and the pass-key to the male world.

My mother was adamantly opposed to the idea, not because it was an unsuitable career for a woman, but worried because I might fail and have nothing for myself. Money was scarce. At this time, a man who was very close to me urged me to go to law school. It was always a wish of his to attend. I think he was vicariously living the experience through me. His support probably tipped the

scales in favor of me coming to law school.

I have never understood the fear of success; instead I have always thought this phenomenon should be more accurately described as a fear of failure. I never told anybody except my mother and the man I was living with that I had applied to law school. I did not want to experience the humiliation I would feel when I received a rejection notice. I was still operating on the mistaken premise that I was really not intelligent enough to go to law school. As a matter of fact, writing this sentence has helped me realize that a motivation in attending law school was to validate my own intelligence. I have always felt, that sooner or later, somebody would call my bluff and expose me for an idiot.

DENISE CHAMBERLAIN

Charlene said that she saw the flame rise last night. It had been years since the flame first rose, but last night the flame rose again. It startled me when Charlene called to tell me about the flame, because it rose for me that night as well.

Incredible. On Tuesday night, we both saw a vision of the pact we had made as children fourteen years ago. Charlene and I had always discussed the type of people we wanted to become. We talked about every facet of life. We had strong ideas about how we planned to develop as individuals. We wanted to go to college and then pursue a career. We wanted to build strong relationships with people: friends, lovers, husbands. In our talks we discussed a variety of ideas: our individualistic natures, our sense of self, philosophies of life, what strengths we possessed, and our dreams. One shared aspiration was a career in law.

One night fourteen years ago, Charlene and I wrote a list of our dreams and desires. It was carefully worded, and written so it would be preserved for all time. The list was a pact in which we promised to fulfill each of our desires. The main thrust of the pact focused on our sense of power. We had power, an internal sense of power, that we planned to develop to its fullest. From that small internal source, we were going to strive to increase our power and become dynamic individuals. We saw power and

control in our destinies, and when we spoke our special incantation that night in front of the fire, we saw the flame rise.

Charlene called to tell me that she saw the flame rise, and now her life was going to change. She said she is going to finish her undergraduate degree and is going to get ready to come to law school. The flame is a catalyst for change.

I've experienced quite a few changes in my life due to the vision and the flame. That pact in front of the fire that night long ago is the reason I'm in law school. The promises I made with my closest friend are the reason I've done quite a few things: college, living in Europe, traveling, work. The incantation represents a desire to develop my sense of "self" to the fullest. It represents all sorts of challenges and experiences.

Over the years, I've told myself that the pact represents most dreams and aspirations that I might have for a life time. Whenever my life seems to become dull from routine, or if problems are beginning to upset me, the vision of the flame renews my sense of power. I feel renewed about my life after remembering the event fourteen years ago, and start a new challenge.

One new challenge was the decision to finally apply for admission to law school. After I finished my undergraduate degree, I wanted to work for several years before I went to law school. I wanted to work in several different fields in order to gain a better appreciation of the type of work I really wanted to do. After five years of work, I was ready to return to school.

KRISTI TREADWAY

I cannot remember my decision to come to law school. It is not related to one conversation, but a series of them. When asked as a child, and later as a young adult entering college, what I wanted to be, the answers established a pattern: writer, journalist, marine biologist, lawyer. I have a desire to be fulfilled in my work. I want my work to be a statement of my life rather than a source of income. It may sound idealistic, but I have a desire to help others. I want to make a contribution to the species and the world.

I felt that law school would provide me with power

that I need. I wanted the power of education and money. Power is essential for change and the kinds of things I want to do with my life. Men need this power too. But women have a stronger need. Legal education provides the skills I need and a law degree forces the world to take me seriously. No matter how thoughtful or intelligent my ideas were, they were denied recognition because of my appearance, my "femaleness." A law degree substantiates my worth.

The power of money, a sufficient income, is also essential. Virginia Woolf summarizes this power in A Room of One's Own:

The news of my legacy reached me one night about the same time that the act was passed that gave votes to women. A solicitor's letter fell into the post-box, and when I opened it I found that she had left me 500 pounds a year for ever. Of the two--the vote and the money--the money, I own, seemed infinitely the more important.

PHYLLIS PALMIERI

The Path That Brought Me to Law School resembles Route 52 from Huntington to Williamson. Or the Ho Chi Minh Trail.

This prologue comes after painfully trying to describe How I Decided What I Decided, If Indeed I Did Decide.

How nice it would be if hypnosis could blot out great portions of the last ten years. Or if I could make the Great Apology. But the events are there forever, the scars that won't heal.

And the secret goes unsaid, unspoken. I have not been able to delve into the scenes, the people, the ideas and experiences of law school. I need the time to remember slowly all the words--the he said, she said, and the thoughts not said. It is not the time for it now, but it will be done.

If what follows seems strained or superficial, consider the bout with self-preservation that produced it. I must survive. I cannot fall back into the past. I need to believe in my self.

Circumstances now bring me precariously close to that chasm of worthlessness that it took 32 years to surmount.

I am desperate to explain.

So, a friend says, try to skirt the issue (mother it? hide it? protect it? protect myself from it?) and treat it superficially. But I cannot do that.

In 1966, when I first sought a path, I wanted to be a doctor. My best friend's father was a doctor. He was the only professional person I knew (teachers and guidance counselors didn't say anything of consequence to me, in spite of the fact that I'd won a full four-year scholarship, and class honors in three subjects by graduation. I had chosen to go to a state "teachers" college; I guess they figured I'd made as good a choice as was necessary. He urged me to go to West Virginia University, and that being the only advice I was ever given about career choices, I took it.

I think a woman's ideas of what she can be spring from what she is, and where she comes from. Parents with a limited education do not say, "Stop." But with limited educational experiences, they are powerless to contribute to the decisions about school, where to go, what to study, what options are available. Of my grandmother's four daughters, only my mother finished high school. My father was one of seven children, of whom only one, the eldest daughter, completed high school.

Beyond their pride in my high school achievements, my parents have never expressed positive feelings about my education. They do not understand, most of the time, what I'm doing or why.

Throughout my senior year, knowing the scholarship was mine, my wizened grandmother frequently cornered me in the kitchen as I washed dishes and on holidays as I munched on the treats she made "just for you, honey," -- to urge that, having passed the age of sixteen, I could quit school and "help mother." Why not? All her daughters had done the same, all but my mother, who had completed high school, then left home to marry my father. My mother and grandmother never got along with each other. That is another story which may be part of this one, but will not be told now.

I was strangely passive about my future. I expected to be carried along to some destination. The dream was that it would be medical school.

I began to realize that I could mold my life instead of being carried along like a seed-pod in a spring brook. This awareness is related to my marriage to a law-student, my social and political life, and my class background.

In 1973, I was married to a man who went to law school. I worked. A month before my job and the marriage started, I had gotten a graduate degree in social work. During the three years Mike was in law school, I worked as a caseworker-supervisor for Allegheny County Child Welfare Services, as a VISTA worker, teaching in an alternative school in Pittsburgh, and as director of social services in a skilled nursing facility for the severely and profoundly retarded. I was still moving along without deciding things for myself.

From 1975 to 1979, the idea of going to law school slowly surfaced. Gradually, the idea became more meaningful as it became more definite. In the beginning, I could have just as well been saying, "I think I'll play second base for the Pirates." The words became firmer: "I want to go to law school in two years." "I've sent for an application." "I've been accepted."

The idea of "going to law school" first came as praise. How odd. I was a social worker, working hard at achieving professional validity. Those who could have said, "That was a hell of a job! Social work isn't as banal as I'd thought!" instead said, "You really ought to think about law school." Law school was the passage from a powerless, amorphous, "female" profession--social work--to the power-wielding, ordering, "male" profession--law.

As a social worker and a woman, I was at best humored and at worst ignored. All the frustrations attendant on ten years of social work, the exasperation at having no weapon to deal with injustice, evil, and pain, were supposed to find relief and release in law school. Going to law school was rooted in the yearning to get tough, to be precise, to speak with the authority of judges and lawmakers, to be heeded. I did not know that validity and power were so great a burden.

By 1976, I was convinced that I would go to law school. My last social work job in Mingo County, West Virginia, isolated me from the university and social life. Mike and I began to drift apart; a split that began while he was in law school deepened. I felt that if only I had a career, something of my own. . . . I was becoming more

and more angry at Michael for his having a career and a profession while I had a job. The job and co-workers were raising questions that I would have to leave the marriage to answer.

I began dying, dying. I remember an October evening in 1977. I was sitting on the sofa in the living room of our trailer. I was working as a paralegal. I enjoyed the job. It was the third job for me since moving to Mingo County. First, I taught freshman composition and rhetoric at Southern West Virginia Community College, then was "director" of a sad little church-funded community action organization called Mountain Information System (MIS).

The legal services job put me in a position to make the law school decision reality. The attorney for whom I worked was approving, praising, and helpful, unlike the attorney I lived with but also worked for, doing the cooking, cleaning, shopping, repairing, mowing, and child caring. All he did was practice law, while I grew more restless and resigned, more bold and insecure. I was torn.

That October evening, I had finished cooking dinner, cleaning up, and running some laundry. He sat in his recliner chair, his throne. It faced the TV. I sat to his left. I was never in his line of vision.

I sat and waited. I wanted to talk about the new job, about the things I was learning to do, about the talents I was timidly beginning to suspect I might have. But he didn't look at me or acknowledge me. Passive so long, I simply waited for permission to speak.

The realization that he saw me but was determined to ignore me brought tears. Finally, he grudging out something, "What's wrong with you now? What are you blubbering about?"

Blubbering! His favorite word for my anguish, my terror, my fear of unending worthlessness and drudgery. How I hated that word! And I hated those lonely, shaming tears. I feel like I cried every day from January 1, 1977 to April of 1979.

What could I say that this mole of a man would understand?

"I don't know who I am anymore. Who am I? What am I? Tell me"

In November, after a long talk with my supervising attorney, I decided to apply to law school. In February of 1978, I took the LSAT. In April, I received a tentative

acceptance from Antioch School of Law. In May, I made a trip to Washington, D.C., for an interview. In June, acceptance and the offer of 100% financial assistance. All set! And for the first time in many years, I moved the process along, and I alone took all the steps without permission, encouragement, or approval.

Then Mike announced that he couldn't go to Washington and neither could our son. So, on an August day we drove to the Charleston Airport and I set out for Antioch, with no place to live, no furniture, no nothing. One suitcase.

Mike drove to Pittsburgh with a friend to a Pirate game. I was back home in ten weeks. He said, "I knew you would be a washout." There were too many visits, made out of a fear of losing this yoke of a marriage. I'd hitch home, fly home. Finally, I bought a car for \$200 ("that car will take you anywhere you want to go") and drove home. That was the last trip home. I decided to leave school. I turned 30. I ate a package of pills. Groggy, fogged up, one of his friends drove me back to Washington to gather up my few things from that little apartment I had just found with the help of a classmate. Efficiency. Security in the building. 14th and Mass. \$160 a month. Beautiful place. Beautiful, beautiful. I can see it still.

I packed my clothes and books and left for good.

I was accepted at WVU in March of 1979.

I divorced Mike in April.