

I Think I Always Wanted to Be Here

Some people will tell you that it's a long way from Westmoreland County to Marshall-Wythe, but I never really believed that. The truth is that where I'm from everyone still goes to church, enjoys the water, and no one becomes frenzied when the Wall Street Journal is unobtainable. Many families are engaged in the traditional occupations of farming, timber-growing, or trading in seafood. Many natives are independent folk who pride themselves on hard work and recreation. The popularly known "Northern Neck of Virginia" is the birthplace of Washington, Monroe, and Lee. Very little of historical importance has occurred there since. The practice of law provides a good deal of "other than the weather" conversation, and court day at the county seats often suffices for serious entertainment.

I am an only child, and my wife never fails to remind me of this. All those who know me still remind me also that I was a rather loquacious little chap. My uncle, a carpenter, told me on more than one occasion I would miss my calling if I didn't become a preacher or a lawyer. I suppose it was upon his early suggestion that I first pondered legalness.

Before high school I spent many younger hours exploring the lower Potomac River, and these escapades imbued me with some indescribable sense of achievement. I would take long walks on the beach, and imagine myself in different heroic roles. The first profession I was interested in was the military, but that was well before I'd really considered these characters called lawyers.

My dad never was overly impressed with attorneys. We all have our original opinions, yet I still think my father is worthy of a double-doctorate in common sense. He once remarked that lawyers are very useful in creating an argument between two people. I hope I have since convinced him that regardless of the source, the lawyer's task is to refine the argument and carry it through.

At the small rural high school in Montross, I found scholarship gratifying when applied in such diverse subjects as government and homecoming. After some modest successes with my best friend and partner on the debate team, the lawyer's role was constantly returning to my mind as a possible career. By the end of my junior year in high school, youthful bliss was gone. I had participated in student politics and definitely decided I wanted to study law. I am more than certain now that my notion of what lawyers do was very romantic. I was more conscious of criminal trial work and government service than I was of such duties as serving a corporate structure or drafting land-sale documents. I had heard by then the tales of the lives of only such men as Marshall, Webster, and F. Lee Bailey.

To me then an attorney had the best of all worlds. He was both renaissance man and an avowed manipulator in the power game. The attorney could choose to aspire to high ideals or, falling short of that, live by his wits and practice a sort of even-handed craftiness. In recent times my views both have and have not changed.

I attended the University of Richmond in 1971



(don't hold it against me) and was determined to do well enough to get into law school. I majored in history and pursued the nebulous pre-law curriculum. I think my biggest mistake was in not taking accounting. We all must learn the linguistics of money, you know. My most illuminating experiences were provided by Kappa Sigma, details of which would most assuredly be improper in literary discourse.

I graduated in 1975 and began working on my future father-in-law's marine construction crew. I knew then I would return to graduate school and was even more intrigued by the prospects of lawyering. Brenda and I were married, and later luck yielded a most superlative number one son. I was blessed with many rewarding friendships and had gotten to know several capable attorneys.

From 1976 to 1978 I was employed by the State Department of Corrections, but I hoped also that this would be a stepping stone back into class. My job as probation counselor allowed me to develop some feel for the machinations of court. More importantly, the exposure to people served as a continuing seminar in human nature. Some days the morass of this bureaucracy was comical. At other times, when

by Lynn Brownley

I was really helping a kid square about, I felt great satisfaction. The responsibility of involvement with other people's lives was enormous. I concluded that all this could be accomplished in grander style. If paper shuffling was the trend why not engage in this with the flare and adeptness of the attorney? I finally applied and fulfilled a promise to myself. Just jump into the fire and deed is done.

In May 1979, the first year of law school finally ended. What a contorting adjustment I had to make from the real world. Taking exams seemed like shooting dice, and I learned early on that hornbooks only help when one reads while awake at the desk. At first everyone tended to hide the ball—Corbin, Blackstone, Dean Williamson, Dr. Gilberts. My tactics, however, had been simple enough, and when confusion ensues, you must never play bashful. Summertime brought employment at a law firm. After that experience I was sure we were all in big trouble. But the distinguished C. Harper Anderson, for whom I also clerked last summer, helped show me how to shovel out of that bucket of mud called legalese.

In our second year, all the gloss is gone. I have buried most of the grand illusions and realize that this will be quite a tough job. I no longer lionize lawyers as omniscient entities in some great chain of being. I have skirmished with the grade chase, law review, and the ritual of moot court. My, how the legal topics cross-reference one another, and such rudiments as estoppel, capital gains, and liens have proven not so intrinsically mystifyne. Be wary, though, as John Levy oft remarks, for the law is open-ended and there will be future battlegrounds in 1981 and beyond.

The best parts of this educational process are truly the personalities. Dean Spong, Colonel Walck, and Mr. Rendleman have had profound impact upon me, honing my uncertain abilities. Likewise, many of my classmates will never be forgotten. It is comforting to know that there can be a niche in this world for otherwise competent creatures who choose to react in the crazy mode.

I am personally inclined toward general practice, for variety is very much the spice of life for me. I am also inclined to return to the country and attempt to become a good local practitioner. I will do my best to see that our courts not "strain a gnat's wings" when the legal result would be unfavorable to my client. Dean Sullivan would, I believe, be most approving of this posture. In free hours I would like to travel and play the piano. After all, I desire to become a competent lawyer, but indeed hope that none of this madness will affect me too seriously.

There is a good possibility that I won't be inside a federal courthouse very often. However, I would never fail to bring such a suit when the issues present themselves. I can imagine dreamily the opening monolog—"Your honor, my main argument may appear patently illogical and contrary to all cognizable precedents and sound public policy. These facts notwithstanding, I am compelled to implore you to consider the matter in light of this most pressing context. Honestly, I almost always wanted to be here!"