

1,095 days (or 3 years) later



By Brendon Stark
The John Marshall Law School

Since I graduated in May, this will be my last “3L in the City” column for *Chicago Lawyer* magazine.

To create the right ambiance, readers may wish to have a couple of songs playing in the background. I suggest Green Day’s “Good Riddance (Time of Your Life)” or Vitamin C’s “Graduation.” Or if you’re in a pinch, Baz Luhrmann’s “Everybody’s Free (To Wear Sunscreen)” but I wouldn’t recommend it.

It seems that some attorneys look back on law school through rose-colored glasses while others unfairly declare that it was the worst time of their lives.

I’m unsure if these past three years were the worst of my life, but I know for certain that none of the three was the best year of my life; that distinction would go to my fourth-grade year, when my only concerns were Little League baseball and Nintendo.

Although law school *may* not have been the worst time of my life, I certainly had moments of doubt and pessimism. I’ve halfheartedly threatened to quit school on numerous occasions, including my last finals week, which, no matter how much I procrastinated, just would never end.

Despite occasional bouts of bitter resentment toward law school — particularly on issues such as tuition hikes, lifeless professors, impossible exams, mandatory grading curves and basically anything having to do with student government — I have been exposed to some remarkable things that almost make sitting through a semester’s worth of income tax lectures worth it.

Looking back, I am actually quite astounded by the number of great experiences I had.

In my time at John Marshall, I met Justice Antonin Scalia; put on a number of criminal trials with my 711 law license; was a panelist

for a Chicago Bar Association fashion show; traveled to Orange County, Calif., for a moot court competition on the school’s dime; and participated in a trial advocacy program in Dublin, Ireland. The Ireland trip was far and away the best experience in my law school career, if not my entire life.

We met two Irish Supreme Court justices, had drinks at the “senator’s pub” in the parliament building, and did our final mock trial at the Four Courts while donning the robes and wigs.

Over this past St. Patrick’s Day, one of the Supreme Court justices and an Irish senator came to lecture at my school.

The lecture was very nice, but the grand part came that night when a group of students were invited out with the Irishmen for dinner and drinks.

We had an absolute riot.

In hindsight it may seem absurd, but there I was, sitting with a Supreme Court justice, sharing a few pints and engaging in a deep, well-reasoned, philosophical debate about which was the better television show: *The Simpsons* or *Family Guy*. And because the justice is back in Dublin and can’t defend his position, I’ll say I won the argument and *The Simpsons* prevails.

Great experiences like this one are what I will most likely remember about law school. The marathon study sessions, the few monotone professors and late-night brief rewrites all seem like blurry, distant nightmares while the great times with friends and colleagues all feel like they just happened yesterday.

In the end, I’m so glad that I didn’t allow myself to succumb to pessimism that would have made me turn tail and run from law school. Sure, law school is grossly overpriced and initial salaries are shrinking almost as fast

as the amount of available jobs, but I am darn proud that I graduated from law school and can call myself a lawyer ... well, once I pass the bar that is.

Since this is my last column, I’d ask you to permit me one last little indulgence.

First, I wanted to sincerely thank you all for reading my columns during the past two years. I’ve received e-mails from a number of readers and although we may disagree, I really can’t thank you enough for taking an interest in my writing.

I have tremendously enjoyed being a regular columnist for *Chicago Lawyer*, which is something I never imagined myself doing when I started law school.

Writing has always been very important to me. I can’t sing or paint or sculpt, but I can, though some may contest, write decently well. Writing has always been my best avenue of self-expression, and *Chicago Lawyer* has been a wonderful forum for that.

I would encourage all of you to pick up a pen and write. Magazines, newspapers and websites are always looking for submissions.

To illustrate the importance of writing, *Chicago Lawyer* recently ran an article on retired Illinois Appeals Court Judge Warren D. Wolfson, who has been writing verse poems since the 1950s.

My favorite line from Wolfson’s poem “Eleventh Floor Lies” is “decisions require words,” because in judicial decisions, as well as poetry, there is a primacy on words. For words are the only tools a lawyer and judges have: words for oral arguments, words for written motions.

I have used my words to express myself in this column during the past two years. Hopefully, you’ve enjoyed them. ■

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