

# The Texas Lawbook

Free Speech, Due Process and Trial by Jury

## Following the Path Mapped by Chance

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Sometimes we meet an individual who leaves a lasting impression, or chance upon an opportunity to try new things and we have to decide: Are we going to leave the safety of the known to try something new?

Seventeen years after entering the profession, I'm proud to say I have overcome some unexpected obstacles a lot of women face in the workplace and I have been recognized by my peers and the legal industry for my accomplishments. I have often been underestimated by my older peers in the profession — if not outright dismissed as the “young associate” — and frequently mistaken for the court reporter in a room full of male attorneys. I have learned to navigate those insults and maintain my civility in a profession where civility is becoming a scarce commodity. But never mistake me for a pushover. I am a warrior and proudly walk onto the proverbial battlefield for my clients every day.

I've had the honor to work alongside some attorneys I believe are truly amazing people, and today I can't imagine myself doing anything else. And I love being in the courtroom.

Most lawyers I've talked to tell me they always knew they wanted to be an attorney. But I never thought seriously about a career in the law, and no one in my family is in the profession. After graduating with honors from Loyola Marymount University, I decided I was going to try to break into the event-planning business. I was good at problem solving and I was good at managing difficult people, so it seemed a natural fit. After finally gaining a dream job at a private business club, I landed a big event: a conference meeting between

Los Angeles and New York for a major Hollywood industry group. Needless to say, the people attending the event had plenty of ego and self-importance to present a challenge.

On the day of the event, my outside A/V company showed up late and was still taping down their microphone wires when a guest wandered into the room, tripped and fell in front of everyone present and watching from New York. While he declined all assistance, he made sure to tell us how important he was and how we would rue the day when his attorney got through with us.

For unrelated reasons that dream job did not last long after that event and I spent several months trying unsuccessfully to find a comparable position and thinking I should try a different career path, but what? Then one day out of the blue, I got a call from Dyan Flyzik, who introduced herself as corporate counsel for my former employer. She informed me I was in the records as the manager on duty the day a man had tripped and fell during an event and asked if I had any recollection of that incident.

We talked several times over the next six months, and eventually she told me that plaintiff's counsel wanted to take my deposition. The night before, she called to tell me that her client (my former employer) had been dismissed from the case. She said I was able to give her such a detailed accounting of the events, she was able to make a proffer of my testimony and convince the plaintiff's attorney to dismiss her client.

We kept in touch and the next time she called, she told me I would make a really good attorney and asked if I had

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ever considered law school. I told her no, other than my mom often remarked that I really enjoyed arguing. This is just one more example of a chance encounter that made all the difference in my life.

With Dyan's encouragement I started a two-year JD program offered through Southwestern Law School at the age of 27, and 20 months later completed the classroom portion of the course. I then completed an eight-week internship with a federal judge as the final requirement for graduation. It was only by chance I was assigned to Judge Terry J. Hatter, Jr., senior judge for the U.S. District Court for the Central District of California. Rather than ignore a short-term judicial intern, Judge Hatter took the time to listen, to recognize my interests and potential, and taught me so much in that short amount of time.

But I still didn't think I wanted to be a "litigator" or have to go to court. And then one day as I was walking on campus, I saw a flyer that advertised a post-law school fellowship sponsored by ABOTA, so I applied and was accepted. This fellowship provided the opportunity to shadow a partner from a plaintiff's litigation firm for a month, then a partner at a defense litigation firm, and finally a month in the courtroom shadowing a judge. That fellowship turned out to be the best thing I could have done to help me realize what type of law I was interested in, and more importantly what

I was not.

I started my first job 10 days after finishing the fellowship when I was two months shy of my 30th birthday. I got a job in construction defect litigation. Fortunately for me, Sheila Brown was a senior associate at the firm and was willing to mentor this new attorney in the practical aspects of practicing law. Thanks to her, I gained a skillset commensurate with a five-year attorney in my first year of practice. That job ended after only a year when the economy took a downturn and layoffs followed. But with Sheila's mentorship, I landed a new position shortly afterwards with a medical malpractice defense firm looking to hire a five+ year associate.

I've mostly worked on the defense side in the medical malpractice field, but I've also dabbled in some other areas of law in state and federal court, never turning down an opportunity to try something new. Sometimes those opportunities take you on an amazing journey. When life presents a new opportunity or challenge, I encourage everyone to remain open to those chance encounters in life.

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