

The Texas Lawbook

Free Speech, Due Process and Trial by Jury

Back to the Future in the Practice of Law

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For as long as I can remember, I wanted to be a lawyer. While my kindergarten friends reveled in episodes of Scooby Doo and Speed Racer, I sat transfixed by old reruns of Perry Mason, my hero. At the tender age of 5, I became determined to become a criminal defense attorney in order to right all the injustices of the world.

After graduating from law school, I went to work for a large full-service firm in Dallas, practicing commercial litigation. (Yes, by that time, reality had set in, and the idea of being a criminal defense attorney did not seem as palatable.) For five years I worked long hours, billing 2,400 hours per year, and spent more time at the office than at home. Part-time lawyering did not exist, and there certainly was no such thing as “hybrid” or working from home. I knew that if I continued to work hard and put in my hours, I would remain on the seven-year “partnership track.”

During my fifth year of practice, my husband received a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to work overseas for two years. Since I was pregnant with our first child, I thought moving overseas for two years was the perfect solution to the childcare dilemma I was experiencing as a young lawyer, working long hours at a highly stressful job. So, my husband and I packed up our bags, sold our house and moved to Oslo, Norway, with every intention that I would return to work in two years.

Twelve years, three additional moves and three children later, I repatriated back to the States. Needless to say, a tremen-



Lynne's oldest son Mitchell, now 29, at the age of 4 while the family was living in The Netherlands

dous amount had happened in the legal field between 1995 and 2007. When I left for Europe, the internet did not exist, and working from home was not an option, regardless of gender or family obligations. Lawyers dictated letters and briefs onto small cassette tapes that were transcribed by legal secretaries using word processors. All correspondence was sent via snail mail, and pleadings were filed via courier, which had to be arranged well before the courthouse closed at 5 p.m. Refusing to be discouraged or intimidated by the new technology, I polished up my resume and reached out to several legal placement services. After all, the practice of law could not have changed that much in 12 years, right? It would be just like riding a bike.

Excited and hopeful about the prospect of resuming my career after so many years, I drove to downtown Dallas for my first job interview since my second

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year of law school. When I arrived at my destination, I was given a form to fill out. I became disheartened when, after name, address and phone number, I was asked to check off all the legal computer programs with which I had experience. Though I had some basic experience with the early versions of Lexis and Westlaw, I had never even heard of Time Matter, PCLaw or Clio. Never mind, I thought, I am sure I will have no trouble learning one of these programs. After all, I had taught myself how to use Word and Excel while caring for three young children. How hard could it be?

As I followed my interviewer into a large conference room, I remained confident that my solid resume, law school ranking and connections in the Dallas legal market would land me a job in no time. I figured that my years overseas in time-intensive volunteer positions, such as president of the American Women's Club of The Hague and founder and chairman of the Pink Ribbon Gala benefiting breast cancer education and awareness in the Netherlands, would show my propensity for hard work, even while outside the workforce. As my interview came to a close, I felt optimistic about my prospects of obtaining gainful employment. And then, it happened. The interviewer uttered the dreadful words I had hoped I wouldn't hear: "I'm sorry, but you have been out of the practice of law just too long."

I left the interview feeling dejected and outdated. I realized that the only way I was ever going to be given a shot would be with someone I knew. So, I dusted off my law school directory and list of former coworkers and began making cold calls to people who knew I was capable of doing the job. I spent the next 10 years performing part-time legal work on a contract basis for various friends, former colleagues and legal temp services. During that time, I had the opportunity to dabble outside the world of civil litigation in which I had grown up and found myself enjoying the challenges of other areas of the law, including probate, family and oil and gas. Moreover, I found that working part-time provided me with the oppor-



Lynne and her family today: Christian, Lynne, her husband Mitch, Mitchell, and Nicholas

tunity to continue to serve on the PTA board and to travel to club baseball and basketball tournaments with my sons.

When my youngest child became a junior in high school, I decided that I was ready to resume my career full time. My children no longer needed me, and I longed for a new challenge to fill my time. While many of my former colleagues were winding down their careers, I was getting ready to gear mine up.

My perseverance paid off, and after more than two decades, I reentered the workforce full time, discovering a renewed passion for the practice of law. I am not the same naïve 25 year old I had been when I first began my career. I am much more focused and confident. Moreover, the experiences I had being a mom have brought a fresh perspective to my law practice, as has the wisdom that comes with age. It's also been encouraging to see the generational changes, as more millennial male attorneys are taking a more active role in raising their children — leaving work to take care of sick kids or running carpools. I also see more of an emphasis on lifestyle than career, and that benefits the priorities for everyone.

Though staying at home drove me bonkers most days, I am grateful for the time I had with my children when they were young. Moreover, my years as a stay-at-home mom have allowed me to more fully embrace this new chapter in life.

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