

The lessons never end



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I've finally reached the end of my law school career. After three years of one of the most challenging and rewarding periods of my life, I've naturally been asked by friends and family how I feel now. And the truth? I'm not entirely sure yet.

At the graduation ceremony, my classmates and I donned the official ceremonial costume, walked across a stage and were presented with the hard-won piece of parchment. It was natural to feel excited and even apprehensive at this novel venture, even despite my father reminding me that he had sat through the same thing two times prior.

Just like the prior two ceremonies, the enthusiasm sprung from the anticipation of uncertainty and opportunity.

But it was different than college and high school. Back then I felt naively confident that I could do anything, without actually knowing what that meant. I was protected from "real life" with the knowledge that I still had three more years before I actually had to face it. It's easy to be excited about a mere possibility. Law school, at that time, seemed a simple way to avoid it.

Having completed the third graduation ceremony and nearly two decades of formal educational training, I know that it was not a simple road. Although I was just as guilty of getting caught up in the idea of the infinite potential my degree affords me as before, fielding questions about how it made me feel brought me back down to earth. Even though I was able to disregard that I had not received all of my grades, I knew I still have one big test.

As I write this, I am a month away from sitting for the Illinois Bar Exam. I initially attacked bar prep enthusiastically but obstinately.

"I'll play your game, Barbri" I thought to myself, "but I'm not gonna like it." I had heard the melodramatic whining from friends who had taken the bar before me, bemoaning that period as the worst of their entire lives.

While I accepted that I wouldn't have fun studying every day, at least I wouldn't be miserable. And I did like it at first. There was a competitive aspect that particularly appealed to me. I would defeat the bar examiners. And I foolishly thought this sentiment would last throughout the summer.

My friends' histrionics were purely theatrical accounts meant only to evoke my sympathy. I would be fine.

It was unrealistic to expect that outlook would survive. Most days I vacillate between tremendous confidence and soul-crushing uncertainty. Sometimes my practice MBE scores are so good I impress myself. Other times they are so bad I think I could have done better had I avoided reading the questions altogether and merely picked my favorite letter.

Apart from my emotional toll, the bar exam has been a test on my sanity. Most times I choose to attend live lectures only as an incentive to get dressed in the morning.

On the days I don't go, I walk around my neighborhood with highlighter marks all over my face while mumbling to myself about the rule against perpetuities and wearing what are arguably pajamas. I feel disconnected from real life. Days and time have lost all meaning.

Notwithstanding my attempts at normalcy, I turn every conversation with friends on any minutiae of life into a chance to review the law.

While riding on a bus, I think of the duty the CTA driver owes to me. While absentmindedly tripping over a crack in the sidewalk, I disregard a possible broken toe and struggle

to remember if Illinois is a pure or partial comparative negligence jurisdiction. I now sign all my checks to the bank as restrictive endorsements.

Some days are more difficult than others, but at the end of the day, at the very root of everything, I came to law school because I wanted to be a lawyer.

Despite my countless rants to the contrary, particularly during the last few weeks, I do believe law school has been a worthy endeavor. Not only am I able to do this, but I have the privilege to do this.

I had the opportunity to attend law school and I was dedicated enough to make it the entire way through. That is something to be proud of. And now I get to sit for the bar exam, in the hopes that in the near future I get to walk across another stage as an admitted member of the Illinois Bar.

When I think back to my expectations as an entering 1L, my reasons for choosing law school then have changed. Back then I had a romanticized notion of what a legal career would offer me. As I've learned more about the legal field and have put the theory into practice during internships, I have become intimately familiar with the responsibility I have accepted. I would never now consider law school the easy way out.

Even though the bar exam is the biggest test I may ever have to take, it is not my last. A legal career will offer the chance to learn something new all the time, to constantly be challenged, to face competition, and wins and losses. Despite spending most of my life engaged in the pursuit of education, I am not done learning. Nor do I want to be. I chose a profession that will test me every day of my life, and I am fortunate for that. ■

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