

Around the Water Cooler

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If at first you don't succeed, try, try again

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Margaret Frossard retired in 2010 after serving 13 years as a justice of the Illinois Appellate Court. She currently serves as the director of the Office of Professionalism & Engagement and teaches trial advocacy at The John Marshall Law School. She can be reached by email at mfrossar@jmls.edu or by phone at (312) 427-2737, ext. 112.

As the director of the Office of Professionalism & Engagement, I meet regularly with students to get their input as to how The John Marshall Law School can improve our delivery of services. Most recently the top concern expressed in those student meetings, particularly by 3Ls, is the need for assistance in their job search. In my last blog, we checked in with recent law school graduate Alex Stamatoglou, who advised that timing is everything in finding the right job. In this column, we hear from Katarina Durcova, who found that if at first you don't succeed in finding a job – try, try again.

Frossard: Katarina, you were recently hired to clerk for Judge Paul Biebel, presiding judge of the Circuit Court of Cook County, Criminal

Division. You interned for me when I served on the Illinois Appellate Court, and as you know, I was extremely impressed by your work ethic and your writing ability. I'm not surprised by your success, but how did this clerkship come about?

Durcova: For the past year, I helped you plan and present a variety of professionalism programs. I met Judge Biebel several months ago when he served as a panelist on a professionalism program offered at John Marshall called "Master the Art of Communication – Don't Become an ARDC Disciplinary Statistic."

Frossard: What did you do as a result of that meeting?

Durcova: I followed your suggestion to use my networking skills and made an appointment to meet with Judge Biebel to discuss my career goals and ask his advice.

Frossard: How would you describe that meeting?

Durcova: Judge Biebel could not have been more helpful. He introduced me to his clerks and gave me some excellent advice. He encouraged me to continue to work hard and to not give up even in this tough economy.

Frossard: Did you discuss the prospect of possibly working for him?

Durcova: I did, but at that point in time there were no positions available.

Frossard: What did you do?

Durcova: I continued applying elsewhere but kept in close contact with Judge Biebel and his clerks. I

attended various networking events that were organized by John Marshall, at some of which Judge Biebel spoke. A few months ago, I was offered a job.

Frossard: How do you compare the work with the criminal division at 26th Street to the work you did for me at the Illinois Appellate Court?

Durcova: My work at the trial and the appellate court levels has been a wonderful learning experience – both provided me with a dynamic and challenging work environment. I look at both experiences as building blocks. At 26th and California, I have been working mostly on post-conviction petitions, which I first became familiar with while working for you at the Illinois Appellate Court. Rather than working with one judge, as I did for you at the Appellate Court, I now work for seven to 10 different judges, all with different personalities and writing styles. I have learned to adapt to each judge's style and to balance various tasks at the same time.

Frossard: Any surprises at your current job?

Durcova: I am pleasantly surprised at how much I get to work with others even in a research- and writing-based position. I have had the opportunity to meet so many different judges, clerks and attorneys and to observe the type of work they do on a daily basis.

Frossard: How did John Marshall prepare you for that job?

Durcova: John Marshall prepared me well for this position by teaching me that professionalism is of utmost importance. I learned that

responsiveness, great organization, and communication skills will foster solid work relationships. I carry my calendar everywhere and I make sure that I communicate clearly with the judges about their expectations and my abilities to fulfill them. As lawyers, we often have caseloads that may be difficult to manage. The skills and strategies I learned at John Marshall have helped me balance a challenging amount of work.

Frossard: Any advice you can give recent graduates who feel challenged by the current job market?

Durcova: Start networking now. Begin with John Marshall faculty – find professors who have interests similar to your own and pick their brains. See if they have former colleagues who might be willing to speak with you. Ask attorneys who have jobs you are interested in to review your resume or writing samples, so they can give you feedback. Participate in the John Marshall mentor/mentee program. Keep busy and stay visible – you can volunteer or intern while you are looking for a permanent position, so that your skills remain sharp and you continue to meet people in your chosen field. Keep in mind, "If at first you don't succeed, try, try again!"

*To view previous blogs by Margaret Frossard, go to professionalism.jmls.edu. Her next blog for *Around the Water Cooler* will be "Why Every Young Attorney Should Want a Mentor – or Three!"*