

Writing *Beyond L.A. Law*

Who doesn't enjoy a good story? Much of the widespread success of *Beyond L.A. Law*, the first new title to result from a partnership between NALP and Harcourt Brace, undoubtedly rests in the number of good stories the book tells — 47 life stories, to be precise.

The law graduates profiled were selected and interviewed by ten NALP authors: Diane C. Ballou, Director of Career Services at the University of Connecticut School of Law; Jacquelyn J. Burt, Esq., Director of Career Services and Adjunct Professor at Seton Hall University School of Law; Kathleen A. Grant, Director of the Career Planning Center of the University of Cincinnati College of Law; Hindi Greenberg, J.D., founder and principal of Lawyers in Transition™ and former business litigator; Laura Rowe Lane, Director of Law Alumni Relations for The George Washington University School of Law; Athena F. Lucero, Recruitment Coordinator for Whitman Breed Abbott & Morgan in Los Angeles; Christina Meincke, Associate Director of the Career Planning and Placement Center of Fordham University School of Law; Elaine Milnor, former Director of Admissions and Career Services for the University of Missouri-Columbia School of Law; Cynthia L. Rold, Esq., former Assistant Dean for Admissions and Financial Aid at Duke University School of Law and a former NALP President; and Ann L. Skalaski, former Assistant Dean for Career Services of the University of Florida College of Law.

All authors report that the graduates they selected were pleased to be interviewed and flattered to be included in the book. In fact, several authors noted that the research and writing process was somewhat akin to the experience of a film maker who shoots reels of film in order to distill a few compelling scenes for viewers. "Many people (not all) told me their whole life story, from childhood to

the practice of law," notes Diane Ballou, "and it was up to me to extract what I needed for the story. I actually had pages and pages of material." She adds: "I felt that the summer I spent interviewing and writing about these people was one of the most productive summers I have had in a long while. There is bond or connection that forms between the writer and the person being written about that is very close in some cases. I do not think those being interviewed intend to tell you so much, but how often do we have a chance to 'tell our story'?"

Other authors echo Diane Ballou's comments. "It was amazing to hear these highly successful individuals talk about the challenges and doubts they experienced when entering the profession," notes Ann Skalaski. "It's very inspiring to see how far passion and motivation can take you!" Laura Lane particularly enjoyed asking graduates if they had a motto they lived by. "Initially," she says, "the grad would usually say, 'Nah, I don't have a personal motto I live by.' But then, as they talked and thought about it, they always came up with one, and an impressive one at that." Lane found this interview question helped her identify themes that would attract potential readers.

For Kathy Grant, "The very best part of the process was spending time with some of my favorite graduates." She notes that she selected graduates based on comments each had made as students. "They were all very hard workers as students," she says, "and took seriously the process of career development and the investment necessary for an effective job search. . . . It was easy to see that they had made their career choices based on something that they believed in."

Several authors observed common themes that emerged in the careers of the successful law graduates profiled in *Beyond L.A. Law*. For example, few graduates landed in a dream job right out of law school. Success depended instead on the ability to remain focused on goals through a series of career moves and life changes. Mentors were another common denominator for many interviewees.

Hindi Greenberg is particularly interested in law graduates who pursue non-traditional careers and comments, “Individuals who change jobs successfully, including those whom I and other authors profiled, are individuals who finally understand the concept of ‘transferable skills’ — that is, that their lawyer skills are extremely useful and desirable in other jobs and careers. The lawyers whom I profiled understand what skills they have to offer and could articulate those skills if they choose to transfer into yet other jobs at some future time.” She adds, “Another interesting thing is the diversity of background, age, and work experience exhibited by those who choose to follow a less traditional legal path or move entirely out of law. There is no predetermined point in time when a lawyer ‘hits the wall’ and decides to seek out an alternative job.”

Several *Beyond L.A. Law* authors shared news of continuing developments in the lives of their interviewees. One of the attorneys Ann Skalaski profiled, for example, was Jay Trezevant, a Lead Trial Attorney in a State Attorney’s Office who

once thought his wheelchair would make becoming a litigator impossible. At the time he was interviewed, Trezevant dreamed of someday becoming a U.S. Attorney. He has now achieved that goal and is a U.S. Attorney for the Middle District of Florida.

One of the more amazing stories included in *Beyond L.A. Law* concerns Antónette Colón, who was profiled by Diane Ballou. Raised in an environment of poverty and abuse, Colón realized through the guidance of a sixth-grade teacher that education could become her ticket to a new life. She was working for Arthur Andersen at the time she was profiled and is now a Tax Consultant with Aetna, Inc. Colón’s roommate works with troubled youth and reads Antónette Colón’s story to these young people — adding a final “punch line” that the story is true and is about her roommate.

Ann Skalaski summed up the reactions shared by a number of authors by commenting, “I thought the interviews were incredible fun and found myself wishing that any law student or lawyer who was discouraged could have the opportunity to talk to one of these inspiring people.” Not everyone may be able to develop the special bonds these authors experienced with their interviewees, but thanks to the research and writing efforts of all ten authors, law students, lawyers, and other interested readers can learn from the 47 compelling stories included in *Beyond L.A. Law*. ■