The Start of a New Life

Matthew Bresette made the move from sawyer to lawyer when he moved from Massachusetts to Missouri. Before law school, he worked in Cape Cod at Howard Boat Shop, where he built wood and fiberglass versions of the all-wood Beatle Cat sailboats. For a time, he was also a ferryboat captain in Boston Harbor. After several years on the water, however, he felt it was time to move on; time, too, for a little adventure away from New England, where he had lived his life so far.

After graduating in philosophy from Saint Michael’s College, near Burlington, Vermont, he worked 50 yards from the Atlantic Ocean on the marsh. His parents live up the street from the shop, and the parents of his wife, Allison, live about five houses from his parents.

“I was accepted at law schools in Boston and Washington, D.C., but Allison and I wanted a change that included a little distance from our hometown for the first years of our marriage,” Bresette says.

The first sight of Washington University pleased him (“the aesthetics of the campus was a big draw”), as did Forest Park (“the true jewel of the city”). He and his wife were also impressed with “how nice everyone here is.” On that visit to Washington University, he remembers, Janet Bolin (see page 39), the assistant dean for admissions and financial aid, went out of her way to make him feel special even though he was just one “very ordinary” applicant out of 1,600.

“The Civil Justice Clinic provided the most rewarding work of my three years in school.”
Matthew Bresette

Five graduates reflect the diversity of the School of Law’s newest alumni. by Martha K. Baker

With family and friends in attendance, members of the Class of 2001 celebrated their symbolic transition to alumni at this year’s Commencement. During the May 18 ceremony in Brookings Quadrangle, the School of Law conferred 187 JD degrees, 25 LLM degrees in United States law, 8 LLM degrees in taxation, 2 JSD degrees, and 1 MJS degree. Attracted to Washington University from different geographic regions, five of our newest alumni reflect on their law school experiences and aspirations.
Bresette also appreciates the law school’s faculty, which he describes as “not only diverse, but also willing to spend time with students.”

He continues, “Frankly, I expected the atmosphere at law school to be more hostile, but I found the cliché of cutthroat competitiveness not true at Washington University.”

In deciding to change his life, Bresette chose law school because he is committed to making a difference. “I eventually want to serve the government, maybe go into political life,” he says. When he evaluated his goals after five years on the water, he says, he realized that he could not achieve them by building boats.

In law school, Bresette led Phi Alpha Delta, the legal fraternity. He ran several programs, including the fall food drive, which collected 4,000 pounds of canned goods for a food bank, and a program teaching basic legal principles to middle-school students in city schools. In addition to being a representative for his class in the Student Bar Association, he also worked on the final presidential debate between Al Gore and George W. Bush, which was held at Washington University on October 17, 2000.

Although he remembers being a bit discouraged after his first year at law school, he found encouragement his second year. “The Civil Justice Clinic provided the most rewarding work of my three years in school,” he says. In the clinic, he represented victims of domestic violence and children in custody battles. “The work was incredibly hard, but we were solving serious problems.” He credits three people—Professor Jane Aiken, director of the clinic; Jane Murphy, a visiting professor; and C.J. Larkin, clinic attorney—for their “outstanding” training.

Meanwhile, he honed his research skills in Advanced Legal Research, taught by Philip Berwick, associate dean for information resources and lecturer in law. “Knowing effective research strategies helped me land a job at Nutter McClennen & Fish LLP in Boston,” he says. Bresette is an associate in the firm’s Trusts and Estates Department.

The Bresettes, with Cider, their yellow Lab, are now back on the East Coast. But they hold in their minds a particular image of Missouri: “The Ozark National Scenic Riverways is amazing: the topography, the wildlife—we even saw great blue herons!—and the incredible azure blue of the springs.”

A Commitment to People

Public service has interested Jennifer Chang since she was in elementary school. For example, students at her grade school chose a government employee to shadow on Government Day; Chang picked a worker in human resources. She decided to put her commitment into practice as part of her education at Princeton University. The summer after her junior year, Chang chose to intern at an agency for the homeless in Massachusetts, working in its soup kitchen.

There is no question about taking her law degree into public service. “This is the work I want to do,” she declares. “I’ve always worked with people and for people, and I’ve always wanted to bring their services up a level.”

Every course she took in law school, she says, intensified her connection to public service: “I remember my first year, studying contracts and torts. I’d think of those principles every time I saw something in the world.” Likewise, when she heard about racism, sexism, affirmative action, gender discrimination, or discrimination for sexual orientation, her thoughts made a beeline to “due process.”

Chang came to Washington University directly from Princeton, where she had earned a degree in history. “I had to learn immediately that the discipline of law is different from that of history. History is concerned with trends; law, with argument. In my view, in law, there is constant door-flipping; that is, if X says something, what can Y say in rebuttal?”

Fortunately, Chang says, she took Civil Procedure with Professor John Drobak the second semester of her first year. “He said that if we had questions to come see him, that his door was open. So I did, during his class and after.”

In addition to adjusting to the study of law, Chang had to adjust to living away from home. For law school, she chose to be in a new part of the world and to gain the independence she had always worked with people and for people, and I’ve always wanted to bring their services up a level.”

Jennifer Chang
that comes from being away from a lifetime of friends and family.

In law school, public service again came to the forefront. During the summer of 1999, Chang helped victims of domestic violence through her AmeriCorps work at the Legal Assistance Foundation of Metropolitan Chicago. Receiving one of several public interest summer stipends from the law school helped to defray some of her living expenses. Then, in 2000, she worked for the National Association for Public Interest Law (NAPIL) in Washington, D.C. This association, she explains, promotes the appreciation of public interest law.

Given her commitment to public service, it was natural for Chang to spend her final semester participating in the School of Law’s Congressional and Administrative Law Clinic in Washington, D.C. Working with the Civil Rights Division of the United States Department of Justice, she looked at allegations of police misconduct in the Special Litigation Section. If a pattern of racial discrimination or unnecessary use of force emerges, a lawsuit is filed. The section also is concerned with fair treatment of people confined in institutions, such as nursing homes and prisons.

Throughout her work with various public service organizations, especially NAPIL, Chang noted that several of her colleagues’ law schools forgave a percentage of loan debt to encourage students to enter this field of law.

“I hope that the School of Law will not only continue to foster interest in this field—especially through professors like Karen Tokarz—but that it will also one day develop its own program of loan-payment assistance,” she says. “That would be the strongest vote for encouraging students to go into public service.”

Meanwhile, Chang has begun her professional life as a clerk for the judges of the Connecticut Superior Court.

A Bridge Between Business and Law

Julie Goshorn recognizes that many investment bankers hold a stilted view of lawyers—and vice versa: “Lawyers think bankers just crunch numbers, and bankers think lawyers just push paper.”

With her combined MBA and JD degrees, Goshorn plans to do both. “Things can get done a lot faster with a bridge between crunching and pushing,” she says. “A lot of law firms don’t see themselves as a business, but now, with the growing size of law firms and with globalization, firms that succeed have to be sound businesses, too.”

Goshorn has always wanted to be a lawyer like her father, who is now a judge. Her parents urged her to think critically and logically until those aspects of argument became second nature. However, she chose to major in economics at DePauw University because numbers intimidated her. “I studied finance as a way to make up for my weakness,” she explains.

A year after she started law school, Goshorn entered Washington University’s MBA program. That means, she says, she was generally older than her fellow law students, but younger than her fellow business students, many of whom returned to school after working awhile. “One of the downsides of pursuing joint degrees is that everyone I started law school with graduated in the spring of 2000 and so did the business students.” The advantage, however, is that she became more observant in her last year of graduate school. “I was a bit of an outsider the fourth year, which allowed me to be somewhat anonymous. Being both an observer and a listener is an intangible I can take to the table.”

Her goal now is to use her legal and business skills in Washington, D.C. The nation’s capital has fascinated Goshorn most of her life. In college, she was involved in a business management program that included an internship during the junior year. When she was asked where she wanted to go, she told her advisors she didn’t care “as long as it’s in Washington.” Although she enjoyed growing up in Bluffton, Indiana, she now wants to live in a large city. “The nine months I lived in Washington count as one of the best times of my short life. I love the political atmosphere there—I find it really exciting and enlivening.” Living in
Washington, D.C., she adds, means feeling more directly involved “even if I’m not.”

After gaining experience and repaying loans, Goshorn hopes to work in politics, possibly in the United States Senate or the White House.

To begin establishing herself in her chosen city, Goshorn interned the summer of 2000 at Arnold & Porter, the large Washington law firm she then joined after graduation. “Washington University is less known to people on the East Coast,” Goshorn says. “But after I interned at Arnold & Porter, interviewers from the firm hired two other Washington U. grads from the law school.”

Goshorn also notes the progress being made by other JD/MBA students. For instance, Royelle Kashiwahara, who also graduated in May with joint MBA and JD degrees, used the MBA half of her degree first to join one of the nation’s major accounting firms. “Around a dozen people were in the program,” Goshorn says. “All the JD/MBA students have interesting backgrounds. Even though we worked toward the same degree, we’re all doing different things with our degrees.”

A Brazilian Lawyer Meets American Law

Miriam Helena Schaeffer didn’t find it difficult to adjust to St. Louis or to law school in general. After all, she had traveled in the United States before. And she had been practicing law for eight years in Brazil.

But Socrates—or, more specifically, the Socratic method—constituted a minor hurdle. “I was not used to being asked questions,” she explains. “Our classes in Brazil were lectures, and we students asked the professors a lot of questions. Here the professor asks the students, and we have to know the answers.”

She grew to like this teaching method. “It made me really prepare for class—and prepare every day, conscientiously, rather than just studying before a final examination.”

In Brazil Schaeffer, who holds the equivalent of a JD degree, had specialized in civil procedure. She served as a judge in small claims court, while also working as a lawyer in different courts.

But when she decided to teach law, Schaeffer knew she needed to expand her knowledge and pursue more education, at least a master’s degree. She won a Fulbright scholarship, and Fulbright administrators helped her identify law schools to consider. Among the candidates were schools in New Orleans and San Francisco. “I knew the East and West Coasts from friends, but I knew I didn’t want to live in Louisiana where it’s hot all the time. I also wanted to learn about the Midwest, so I found Washington University on the Internet. It was love at first sight!” she says. “I asked the Fulbright people if I could come here for law school, and they said, ‘Yes, it’s a wonderful school.’ ”

Schaeffer says the part of Brazil where she lives in the southern state of Rio Grande do Sul (near the Argentine border) enjoys four seasons, just as St. Louis does, and her home, Novo Hamburgo, is a city (population around 300,000) with a small-town atmosphere, just like St. Louis. “I prefer quality of life,” she says. “It would be difficult to live in New York City. It’s just buildings and buildings. But here, there is Forest Park with all the trees and leaves.”

She came to the United States already speaking excellent English. Still, reading law books in English took time at first. “I had to stop every five minutes to look up words, but, by the second month, I was getting used to reading legal English.”

“I stopped everything in my career to come here to study. I like being a judge, and I like being a lawyer. But I think I can do more as a teacher of the law.”

Miriam Helena Schaeffer

As an LLM student, Schaeffer had a mentor, Stacy Young, JD ’02, to whom she turned for practical advice (such as which laptop computer to buy), but she also received informal help from fellow classmates like Rebecca Garcia, JD ’02, in her immigration law class. “Immigration law is very difficult if you come from outside the United States. So Rebecca told me, ’I will sit with you every morning to go over whatever you don’t understand.’ And she did.”

It was because Schaeffer wanted to know United States policy concerning
immigration, especially as applied to unlawful aliens, that she took the class in immigration law. “I knew how hard it was to obtain a visa; now I know that immigration is a lot about politics.”

Schaeffer completed an internship clerking for Judge Jean Hamilton, JD ’71, of the United States District Court, Eastern District of Missouri, the summer after she earned her LLM. “I needed practical training, too,” she says. “Theory and practice are always different.

“I stopped everything in my career to come here to study, something my fellow lawyers in Brazil do not do often,” she says. “I like being a judge, and I like being a lawyer. But I think I can do more as a teacher of the law.”

A Natural Leader
Kyle Williams usually ends up in a lead role. For example, in his last year as an undergraduate majoring in finance, real estate, and law at California State Polytechnic University, he served as president of the student body. Then, after starting as a representative at T. Rowe Price in Los Angeles, he was supervising a dozen securities traders within a year.

The pattern held at Washington University School of Law. “For two years in law school, I vowed I would do nothing but read and study,” Williams says. “Then the cuffs came off toward the end of the second year, and I became editor-in-chief of the Journal of Law and Policy.”

If traced accurately, he says, this tendency of his goes back to being president of the student body, when he first sensed that people genuinely want change. “People are very aware of problems around them. They just don’t have an energizing impetus.” Nor, he adds, do people often have the broad view required to take the big steps necessary to effect change. “I enjoy being that agent of change, that catalyst,” he admits.

He invited change into his life when he moved from Los Angeles to St. Louis. “It’s been eye-opening,” he says. “Los Angeles is very big. It’s very hard to get a handle on how pockets of culture interact. St. Louis is a more concentrated place; everything is more microcosmic.”

Williams grew up in a white neighborhood (he was one of the few African Americans in his grade school, in his high school, and at Cal Poly). When he came to St. Louis, he says, he could easily see how blacks and whites identify within one culture; unfortunately, the result is often a lack of communication between the races.

“My experience has focused my desire to work in finance, in general, and securities, in particular, in ways important to policies, especially to minorities,” Williams says. As a research assistant for Joel Seligman, dean and the Ethan A.H. Shepley Distinguished University Professor, Williams read cases and rules—not to pass an exam, but to see if the rules work practically. “Working with the dean enabled me to feel comfortable thinking critically about policies rather than just analyzing transactions.”

Although he had grown up thinking he wanted to work within a corporate structure, his realization that “race issues lurk behind” corporate decisions became a powerful motivator in choosing a different career direction. In his first semester at law school, Williams saw what few lines poor people have to the systems of law and finance and how that lack of access affects social structure. “In California, it’s a half-hour drive to go from the rich to the poor; in St. Louis, all I had to do was walk across the street.”

Williams has taken a position in New York City with Davis Polk & Wardwell, one of the country’s largest securities law firms. During his internship with the firm in the summer of 2000, he was impressed with the firm’s involvement in policies and community development. “Davis Polk is also the most idea-diverse law firm I came in contact with,” he says. “Plus, it’s the norm to publish there, to combine practice with the academic.”

He has planned his future—a federal clerkship, experience with a government agency (perhaps the Securities and Exchange Commission), maybe political office. But, he says with a smile, “I’ve had to revise my plans so often before.

“I enjoy being that agent of change, that catalyst.”

Kyle Williams

It’s important to have a plan, but not necessarily to stick to it all the way. It’s also important to let your passions come in. If you’re aware of the road’s twists and bends, you’ll reach where you were going in the first place.”