

*Gregory Peck personified the role of the idealistic lawyer as Atticus Finch, the small-town attorney who fights racism in an Alabama town, in this scene from 1962's To Kill a Mockingbird.*





# The Profession: A Search for Satisfaction

Much has been written in recent years about the changing nature of the legal profession and how lawyers are balancing work/life issues in an increasingly competitive environment. Yale Law School students and alumni have engaged in these conversations at every opportunity—in the classroom, in programs run by the Law School's Career Development Office, in talks sponsored by the Dean's Program on the Profession, and, most recently, at Alumni Weekend.

The *Yale Law Report* recently asked some alumni about their career choices and their satisfaction with them. Graduates were also asked if they had any advice for current students. Here's what some of them had to say. >>>

## Having a Plan Makes All the Difference

Bernadette Atuahene '02

*Assistant Professor of Law*

*Chicago-Kent College of Law*

**Employment** Fulbright Scholar, South Africa...clerkship, Constitutional Court of South Africa...French studies in Paris...associate, Cleary, Gottlieb, Steen & Hamilton...assistant professor of law, Chicago-Kent College of Law.

**The Yale Law School experience** Yale helped me to shape my goals. I traveled a lot during summer fellowships, and gained valuable experience. Later, when searching for a job, the Law School provided an unbelievable amount of help and coaching when I was on the market.

**Rewards...and Regrets** I love teaching at Chicago-Kent. I love the student interactions, the interactions with my colleagues, and my research agenda. I didn't join the *Law Journal* at Yale, but instead wrote my own article which was eventually published in the *University of Puerto Rico Law Review*, and this success set me on the road to teaching.

At Cleary I found that there is a huge amount of pressure placed on associates, but I did learn a lot. I was on the team that represented Argentina in its historic debt restructuring transaction, and I traveled to El Salvador and Guatemala representing underwriters in debt issuances. The big picture was very exciting, and so was the travel, but some of the other work was quite unchallenging. The private sector wasn't what I wanted, and I think that I would have been frustrated if I didn't have my exit plan prepared before I entered Wall Street.

**Advice** Follow your passions.

## Combining Social Justice with a Passion for the Environment

Nancy Brockway '73

Principal

NBrockway & Associates, Boston

**Employment** Staff, various legal services/legal aid programs...staff, Maine Public Utilities Commission...general counsel, Massachusetts Department of Public Utilities...legal support and expert witness, National Consumer Law Center...member, New Hampshire Public Utilities Commission...founder and principal, NBrockway & Associates (an energy and utility consulting practice).

**The Yale Law School Experience** I got a great grounding in black-letter law, along

with a healthy dose of realism about the power politics that lie behind many real-life decisions of supposedly impartial decision-makers. I also got a degree that opened many, many doors.

**Rewards...and Regrets** As the whole nation is realizing today, energy is at the core of our economy and our way of life, and our energy use has a major impact on the natural environment. It has been tremendously exciting to be a part of the policy debate about these crucial aspects of industrial and post-industrial infrastructure.

I would have tried not to move around so much. I lost opportunities to build longer-lasting professional relationships. On the other hand, moves that felt like losses opened doors to other opportunities.



Raymond Burr as Perry Mason produced a generation of lawyers and judges inspired by Mason's clever detective work and dramatic courtroom showdowns in this popular television drama of the 1950s and 1960s.

## Don't Follow the Money

Robert S. Litt '76

Partner, Arnold & Porter

Washington, D.C.

**Employment** Clerkships, Hon. Edward Weinfeld, SDNY, and the Hon. Potter Stewart, United States Supreme Court...Assistant U.S. Attorney, SDNY...attorney, Williams & Connolly...Special Advisor, U.S. Department of State...Deputy Assistant Attorney General, Criminal Division, U.S. Department of Justice...Principal Deputy Associate Attorney General, U.S. DOJ...partner, Arnold & Porter.

### The Yale Law School Experience

At the most basic level, participation in Barristers' Union convinced me that I wanted to be a trial lawyer, and doing well at Yale helped me get rewarding clerkships that opened a lot of professional doors. My Yale education taught me not only how to think like a lawyer, but how to question and understand the underlying bases of the law. The conceptual issues that are often the focus of Yale classes (as opposed to the black letter) often provide useful intellectual frameworks.

**Rewards...and Regrets** The most rewarding part of my practice, both professionally and personally, has been the time I spent in public service in the government. The work was more interesting and the satisfaction level much greater. Unfortunately the pay ain't great and, when one reaches the political levels in the government, you are dependent on having the right people in power. In the time I have been in practice, private practice has turned from a learned profession into a business, and I find that much less satisfying.

**Advice** Don't follow the money. Do what it is that will give you the most career satisfaction.

### Making a Difference, However You Can

Matthew Palmer '90 LL.M., '94 JSD  
*Pro Vice Chancellor*  
(Law and Government) and Dean of Law  
Victoria University of Wellington,  
New Zealand

**Employment** Senior Economic and Financial Analyst; Manager, New Zealand Treasury...Deputy Secretary for Justice (Public Law), New Zealand Ministry of Justice...Dean of Law, Victoria University of Wellington.

### The Yale Law School Experience

Yale Law School's emphasis on excellence and humanity has been relevant to all the positions I've held, as were the thinking skills, attention to principle, and legal and policy skills I gained while at Yale.

**Rewards...and Regrets** My work in New Zealand public service was tremendously exciting—making a difference to key areas of New Zealand law and policy. After a while, the long hours, stress, and having little time for proactive initiatives got to me.

Being Dean of Law has many demands, but also room to take initiatives, and make a difference to generations of law students, in a longer-term sense.

**Advice** Make a difference. And don't believe you can't.

### A CAREER SNAPSHOT The Classes of 1996–2000

How do the most recent YLS graduates feel about the legal profession? Each year, the Law School's Career Development Office surveys graduates five years after their departure from Yale Law School. For some highlights from the most recent survey, see page 117.

### Rewards of the Judiciary

Eric Smith '79  
*Superior Court Judge*  
Palmer, Alaska

**Employment** Attorney, Office of General Counsel, Environmental Protection Agency...executive director, Trustees for Alaska...founded firm specializing in environmental, Native, nonprofit, and administrative law...Judge, Superior Court.

### The Yale Law School Experience

The principal value of my Yale Law School education was in the training of how to frame legal issues and concepts and in the challenging rigor of the classes, exams, and papers. The courses focused on the

“This constant awareness of the importance of being both substantively and apparently fair and respectful has been an important lesson.”

broader policy issues underlying the law, which was very important as I moved more and more into public interest law. As a judge, that policy focus remains helpful, since judges must always be aware of the context of their rulings.

**Rewards...and Regrets** My years of environmental and Native issue work were incredibly rewarding. I was able to influence a number of cutting-edge legal issues in Alaska, most notably involving Native hunting and fishing rights and tribal sovereignty. I traveled extensively in rural Alaska, meeting Alaska Natives from a variety of cultures. I also participated in a number of international treaty negotiations involving Native rights. One of my principal foci was integrating indigenous knowledge and understanding into governmental decision-making and finding ways to compel the government to accept non-Western forms of knowledge. I have come away from these experiences with a deep understanding of the importance of looking at problems and solutions from a variety of different, including non-Western, perspectives.

The principal downside of my legal career was the travel. As my family grew, it became harder and harder to justify being away from them for long periods of time. As a sole practitioner representing relatively impoverished clients, there also were the usual concerns about finding adequate insurance and planning for retirement.

Becoming a judge was an excellent change for me, for which I have no regrets. The judicial role has been very interesting and in some ways very difficult. Judges wield a lot of power, but at the same time, very little. We can require people and institutions to act, but our authority is surprisingly bounded by the perception of those who come to the courtroom. An apparent lack of fairness and respect can substantially undo any benefit wrought by a ruling. This constant awareness of the importance of being both substantively

and apparently fair and respectful has been an important lesson.

A significant reward of my judicial position has been the opportunity to affect individual lives in a meaningful way. I spend a substantial portion of my time settling cases, principally divorce cases, in an effort to minimize disruption to the children. My sentencing comments necessarily address the social and emotional impacts of crime—I often find that a defendant's rehabilitative prospects can be strongly influenced by the way I treat him or her and the things I say.

**Advice** It is very important to have a good sense of why you want to be a lawyer and how you plan to go about achieving your goals. It also is very important to be flexible—I had no idea I would end up living in Alaska when I graduated from law school. And it is important to use the great gift that we are given as Yale graduates not only for our own benefit, but for others as well. Yale Law School gives students an incredibly complete tool box, as it were—but that's all it is. The test of our success is what we do with it.

## The Road to In-House Counsel

Wendy L. Hufford '86

Senior Global Litigation Counsel,  
GE Consumer Finance  
Stamford, Connecticut

**Employment** Clerkship, SDNY...Litigation Associate, Davis Polk & Wardwell...Vice President and Senior Litigation Counsel, Credit Suisse First Boston...Vice President and Senior Litigation Counsel, GE Card Services...Senior Global Litigation Counsel, GE Consumer Finance.

## The Yale Law School Experience

Yale Law School provided me with an excellent foundation for my chosen career. Not only did I learn the law but, more importantly, I learned how to think about the law and apply it to any situation that I would confront.

**Rewards...and Regrets** I have really enjoyed each and every job I have held. I thought being a law clerk was a perfect first job and my judge was a mentor to me for many years. I enjoyed working in Davis Polk's litigation department and was continually challenged by numerous complex litigation and regulatory matters. When I moved in-house, I found it extremely rewarding to work for just one client and develop long-term relationships with business people. Finally, I just love being an in-house attorney for General Electric Company, the most respected company in the world. I have interesting work (lots of it!), terrific managers, fabulous training, and the support of a world-class organization.

Litigation management for a major corporation is a demanding occupation and often requires major time commitments and international and domestic travel that on occasion can conflict with family obligations.

If I were to start all over again I would stay an extra year at Yale and get a JD/MBA. I think that it is harder to learn the finance and marketing sides of a busi-

ness without having any business experience or formal training.

**Advice** Find a judge, law firm, or company that suits your personality and long-term goals. You need to be honest with yourself about what type of work is interesting to

you and how hard you want to work and how much time you want to devote to other activities. In addition, you need to be thinking not only about the first job, but about the second and third jobs so that you can get the critical experience you need to follow your dreams.

“Find a judge, law firm, or company that suits your personality and long-term goals. You need to be honest with yourself about what type of work is interesting to you.”

## Use Your Position to Give Back

Joseph S. Iseman '41

Of Counsel

Paul, Weiss, Rifkind, Wharton & Garrison  
New York

**Employment** Associate, Cohen, Cole, Weiss & Wharton...attorney, War Production Board...Army service...division plans officer, North African Division, Air Transport Command, Casablanca...manager, Abadan Air Base...founder and first managing director, Iranian Airways Corporation...Aviation Department, Chadbourne, Wallace, Parke & Whiteside...associate, partner, and of counsel, Paul, Weiss, Rifkind, Wharton & Garrison.

## The Yale Law School Experience

My first-year courses were important because I came to Yale with an undergraduate background only in the humanities. As an officer of *The Yale Law Journal*, I learned how to conduct legal research, present reasoned arguments, and write as clearly as possible. I also found it useful to engage in bull sessions with my classmates in which we would hammer out the pros and cons of every issue. I also became well acquainted with contemporaries who in later years would come to dominate both the public and

private sectors of law in the United States. While my own career has been in private practice, it has been national and international in its scope and has involved contact with Yale-trained lawyers around the globe. Some of these contacts have continued into old age. This past summer I spent a week visiting a classmate, both of us on the cusp of attaining age ninety.

## Rewards...and Regrets

As I have practiced as a generalist, my rewards have included (in addition to a comfortable life-style) exposure to a wide breadth of intellectual experiences. I learned the leadership skills required when one captains a team. I am particularly proud of some of the institutions I have created along the way, including the public television station in New York, higher education facilities in the former Soviet bloc, and health improvement activities in Africa.

Sometimes the work I've had to do for clients—which often has involved reducing their tax burdens—has been inconsistent with my own political and social views that the rich should bear at least their proportionate share of the social burden.

**Advice** You are in a very privileged position that gives you an obligation to do something for the people (whether in an African village or an American urban slum) who didn't make it to Yale.



## Getting the Work/Life Balance Right

Paul P. Morf '97

Member, Simmons Perrine Albright & Ellwood, P.L.C. (a thirty-five-attorney firm)  
Cedar Rapids, Iowa

### Employment

Clerkship, Judge David R. Hansen, United States Court of Appeals for the Eighth Circuit...member, Simmons Perrine...adjunct professor, University of Iowa College of Law.

### The Yale Law School Experience

I firmly believe that law school is largely a "credential" and that most of what one needs to know to practice law, especially in a transactional setting, one learns on the job.

Yale was, for me, a time to think contemplatively about my priorities, my goals, my values, and what compromises I was and was not willing to make to meet the world's definition of success. The "no grades" system certainly facilitates such self-awareness and reflection.

At Yale I met and became friends with people from all walks of life, backgrounds, and cultures. I am a much more tolerant, open-minded, and thoughtful person than I was when I matriculated at Yale. I wouldn't trade my time at Yale for anything.

**Rewards...and Regrets** My choice had more to do with life-style than with career, which is, I suspect, relatively unusual for a graduate of Yale Law School. I live with my family on an eighty-five-acre farm that is an eighteen-minute commute from work. In the past few years, I have spent my weekends planting more than 4,000 trees, restoring more than twenty acres to native prairie grasses and prairie wildflowers, doing structural repairs to the old barns, and building new ones. My practice is rewarding and I have an opportunity daily to implement tax-sensitive estate planning and regularly to represent my clients in

court. But my life is more rewarding than my career, and my life (rather than my career) is and always has been my focus. I am fully engaged with the community and—more importantly—with my family.

Estate planning is a great field for people who like human interaction, who like to help people, who enjoy complex puzzles, and who prefer to spend less of their time fighting over problems and more of their time preventing or solving them.

Practicing in a smaller firm in a smaller city has rewards as well. It means making somewhat less money than one would

that I go to work every day and make the world significantly better. I have arguments that I can make to suggest that I in fact do so, but only in a rather indirect way. I find much more psychic or "spiritual" satisfaction in my volunteer activities, in my parenting, in my human interactions, and in my physical labor at our farm than I do in my legal practice.

**Advice** As a Yale Law School graduate, money will not be the factor that limits your happiness or the meaning in your life. Don't choose your career based on money. Choose your career based on the



*Ally McBeal, a television series that debuted in 1997, offered a different take on the legal profession: Calista Flockhart (left) portrayed a young single lawyer looking for personal and professional satisfaction.*

make at the nation's largest and best firms. We work fewer hours, we are less leveraged with associates, and our hourly rates are lower. This necessarily translates into lesser profits per partner. However, the cost of living is lower, and I am of the opinion that society overestimates the correlation between increased income and increased happiness.

My biggest dissatisfaction with the legal practice is the lack of a verifiable belief

kind of life you want to lead, the kind of person you want to be, and the kind of community and world you want to live in. For some people, this means traditional "public interest" law. For others, it means government service. For me, it meant returning home to enrich my rather modest community as best I can through charitable activities, active parenting, and a balanced life. **Y**