

McGeorge Legacies | Skye Dawson ('22)

It does not seem uncommon for children of lawyers to pursue legal careers. It seems like it would be hard to see your parent be so successful and potentially have such a positive influence on the community and not want the same for yourself. At least that was my experience.

My father learned his love for serving the community from his parents. He put his passion to work in the public defender's office, representing disproportionately marginalized communities. I grew up visiting him in the office and as I got older, started helping him – rather than just running around taking candy from attorneys' desks. This unique experience instilled in me a desire to serve the community with my passions. It also showed me how many other underserved, misunderstood communities are out there and need help.

One of the most memorable days going to work with my father was an emotionally tough day. We drove down Bannon Street in North Sacramento. The area is flooded with displaced people. Their tents lined the road, mere feet from passing cars. My dad said he knew several of them after representing them on various homeless-related 'crimes.' Many were veterans, forgotten after serving their country, others were regular people who suffered from mental illness but could not afford treatment. While this was bleak and heartbreaking, by going to work every day my dad does what he can to help. How could I not want to help in whatever way I could?

Having a lawyer father, I understood what a legal career could do - not just for me, but for those I care about and those I have not even met. There have been countless times where someone has come to my father on their worst day and after only a short period of time talking to them, he made them feel better about their situation. He's a wonderful human, but this ability to begin fixing someone's problems by simply talking to them is a common trait in the legal community. This trait is one I always admired and wished to learn myself. Knowing my father's experience at McGeorge and knowing the positive impact the school has on the community, deciding to attend was an easy decision.

Over the last three years, my expectations have been met time and again. My first semester at McGeorge, I mentioned I was interested in Marijuana Law; within a month, I had an interview with Natura Life + Science, a local start-up dispensary, for a position as an intern for their legal department. When I found out I got the internship, I was unsure about how it would

align with my goals to serve the community. I did not know I could serve the community while working for a business. I started working and fell in love with many of the projects I worked on. One project struck home: the dispensary wanted to help advocate for marginalized communities, particularly veterans and minorities charged with cannabis related offenses that have now been decriminalized. Working on this project, I researched cannabis related arrests for minorities compared to other ethnicities and how other cities had expunged these types of charges outside of court. I even put the dispensary in contact with a local lobbyist group looking for a cannabis company to partner with. COVID-19 halted the plans, but I discovered my passion for cannabis advocacy relating to both business regulations and criminal justice.

Working with my dad, I learned that criminal defense was not in my future. However, the aspects I enjoyed while working with and watching my dad, I have begun to seek out in other areas of law. I have discovered a passion for Marijuana Law, but in such a niche form. I hope to better the community by tackling the racism and injustices associated with marijuana, and use my legal abilities to empower the communities disproportionately harmed by the war on drugs.

This rather specific niche is essentially only possible because I already knew what I could be, and I had a model to see what community service looks like. It seems odd to say but, my dad's career showed me what creates crime and poverty and how society has mishandled mental illness and marijuana use. My passion for Marijuana Law and serving the public has led me to this point. While at McGeorge, I have taken courses that incorporate Marijuana Law into their curriculum such as Bioethics: Life and Death and Health Law. These courses, while not focused on cannabis, touch on the role cannabis plays in their fields. Additionally, in my final semester, I am taking Marijuana Law. I look forward to diving deeper into the history, regulation, and potential for growth within the industry. I hope to take the knowledge I have and will acquire to further my future career: advocating for comprehensive marijuana regulation, complete and immediate expungement of all possession and sale of marijuana convictions, and providing career and educational opportunities for those whose records have been expunged.

McGeorge Legacies | Norman Dawson ('93)

I started at McGeorge as an evening student in 1989. My daughter started her law school career at McGeorge 30 years later, to the day.

I was a night student because I wanted to get work experience during the day. Back then, the night division was much larger than it is today. That first week, Dean Schaber met with my class and said, "Look to your left and to your right, one of those folks won't be here next year." I thought he was talking to me. Right then I vowed to study much harder than I did in college. Sadly, for others, Dean Schaber was right. My class started with nearly 100 evening students and ended with 63.

I actually enjoyed law school classes. I was one of the youngest people in the evening division and I quickly met older friends. They took me in and made me feel like I was part of a special group. They advised on studying, life, employment, and relationships during law school. Those friendships, and a very understanding spouse, were how I was able to finish law school and pass the Bar.

Late in my first year, I met Assistant Public Defender, Tommy Clinkenbeard (a McGeorge alum). I met Tommy through a strange McGeorge connection. I was hired as a student intern with the "Small Claims Advisor's Office." That was an office run by McGeorge's Community Service Clinic. Professor Kathleen Friedrich oversaw it. In those days the Small Claims Court was in the county building at 827 I Street. The Public Defender's Office was in that building and I met Tommy in the cafeteria. I wanted to be a litigator and Tommy was one of the best. He became a mentor. He checked in on me every few weeks and kept me apprised of potential internships in his office. When I became eligible to for certification, I applied for the first open Public Defender internship. I was hired as a full-time intern in August of 1991. From that day, I was hooked. I have been here ever since. Thank you, Tommy!

In my first months as an intern, I touted our office to other students and soon several of my friends were hired as well. We loved working together during the day and then going to classes together at night. Because of our schedules and the growing bond between us, we did everything together. When we passed the Bar we were all sworn in together by Judge Stephen Porter, the father of my classmate and colleague, Nancy Porter. Within a few months, our entire

group was hired as Assistant Public Defenders. It was an exciting time. In many ways that was the very best part of my career.

As time went on my law school friends moved on to other positions. I have remained in the Public Defender's Office. My career has been very eventful and most enjoyable. I love litigating and there is no better place to be a trial attorney. We share camaraderie and joy when we succeed, and there is always someone to console you when you lose. Most significantly, we all believe that our job is critical to upholding the Constitution. We stand proudly on our soapboxes. I did not get rich in the job, but I never expected to. After 30 years, it is both trite and true to say that enjoying your job is far more important than making lots of money.

Now I have the pleasure of watching my daughter go through the same trials and tribulations that I once did. I am not sure if it is nostalgia I feel, or PTSD. I am amazed at how hard she works and what she has accomplished in her own short legal career. She grew up in the Public Defender's Office. She came to work with me many days in her youth. When she reached high school, she volunteered on several cases. In law school, she took on internships and externships in this office for other attorneys. Apparently, she has some real skills, as she reminds me with regularity. I want her to find her own way in this journey and I know she will be successful. She made her own law school friends and they are as special to her as my "old mates" were to me.

As for me, I have a few years left in the old "gas tank." I supervise the Homicide and Death Penalty Unit now. While the work is stressful, it is also very rewarding. My team is young (compared to me), brilliant, and they remind me every day of why I do this job. Several of them are also McGeorge grads. While it is rather unusual to spend an entire career in the same position, it has been exactly what I wanted to do since Tommy Clinkenbeard regaled me with tales of his courtroom battles, (successes and failures) throughout his career.

Thanks to McGeorge for the opportunity, to my classmates and colleagues who were so special along the way, and to my daughter, who let me be a small part of her law school experience. Congrats to the Evening Division Class of 1993—retirement is coming—and to the class of 2022! Your journey is just beginning. What a ride it will be.