

Ever since I was a young child I can remember telling my parents I wanted to be a lawyer when I grew up. Both of my parents supported this notion because they believed that I could certainly argue like a lawyer! Fast forward 12 years.

I graduated from high school in 1990 and decided to attend a community college to rid my curriculum of the basic core classes. Since I graduated with honors and as Salutatorian, I thought college would be a breeze, especially a community college. I was shocked to learn in my first semester of college that I was not nearly as smart as I thought I was and even worse, I no longer knew it all. What devastation to an eighteen year old who was determined to be out of law school in record time!

My third semester in community college my dream was no longer becoming a lawyer but merely graduating from a two-year community college with a degree in liberal arts. At this point, I knew it would take me longer than the standard two years to complete my courses but I still had some measure of wishful thinking.

My fourth and fifth semesters in community college were just going through the motions. I had basically conceded to taking one or two classes a semester and had started working fulltime in a nowhere-to-go job. I was in my early twenties by this time and basically had no responsibilities because I lived with my mother for the most part. I *thought* I was earning good money and I knew I had good benefits but there was still something missing. After four years working for an insurance company, I decided I had more capabilities and desired more than to be a step on someone else's ladder. I chose to take a new job with a legal staffing company. Although my job was not to be sent on different legal jobs, I was introduced to the legal world. I administered legal tests and spoke to law firm administrators and spent time with legal secretaries and paralegals. I

saw several aspects of these women's lives that I longed for. How awesome would it be to work on my own schedule? How would it feel for a company to request my employment? How could anyone not want to make the money these women were making? I began to practice by taking the legal tests and typing tests. I was surprised at my ability. I was still at a crossroads over how to "break into the legal world" though, but as luck would have it, the staffing company decided to close its doors and my boss helped get me a job as a receptionist in a mid-size law firm.

I have to believe that because I gave more than the standard 100%, that my employer recognized my potential and helped me to learn all I could about law firms and the way they operate. After one year as a receptionist, I was offered a full time position as a legal secretary to two associates doing workers' compensation. I thrived in this position. I was happy and I enjoyed what I did although it soon became boring to me for reasons I could not understand. I spoke with others about this and came to the conclusion that workers' compensation was just too repetitive and dull for me. I began to interview with other firms and a senior partner at a very small firm hired me. He did strictly litigation and I was all of a sudden in a new world. Thankfully, he had the most awesome paralegal and to this day I have never worked with a better "partner." She showed me the ropes, encouraged me and told me she had all the faith in the world in me. The two years I spent at this firm doing litigation is the cornerstone of where my career has taken me. I knew the gusto of litigation was just what I wanted to spend my life doing; however, I needed an education to promote myself. This is when I began taking courses to obtain a degree in paralegal studies.

Unfortunately, this firm split after one year and rumors began of another split after another year. I learned the hard way that law firms are notorious for splits and mergers and, in general, it was accepted that secretaries and paralegals change firms often. Knowing that, I decided to make another move. I interviewed with a partner and associate at a large firm and got the job. My years of hard work and few classes had finally paid off. I was offered a starting salary that was almost \$4,000 more than I asked for in my interview.

After Hurricane Katrina, my lawyer decided to start his own firm. Although I am no longer with a large firm, I am now going on seven years with the same attorney. I have no plans to change jobs again until he retires.

Now, you ask why I am choosing to become a paralegal. After years of being a legal secretary, I realize that I do in fact have the potential and ability to do even more to help my boss, our firm and our clients. I am curious and I want to learn and not only do I want to do the best I can do but I want to be the best I can be. I see no better opportunity in any employment field for a young person to be able to earn good money, secure good benefits, find life-long friends, become members of professional organizations, do more for the greater good and most of all become a very important asset to a profession that will always need her.

I have said for years now that I could not do my job without my lawyer and chances are he could not do his job without me. That is how confident I have become doing legal work. However, I now realize that for me personally, it is impossible for me to be a lawyer but I feel I am choosing the next best thing to making that dream come

true. I have four classes to complete before I obtain my paralegal degree and it has been a long time coming but I know this is where I was meant to be.