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From Attorney to Law Librarian – One Road Map to a Changed Career*

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I graduated from UC Hastings in 1997, and I admit that the idea of becoming a law librarian never once crossed my mind during law school. In fact, I followed a conventional path throughout law school. I participated in on-campus interviews and worked as a summer associate at a downtown law firm. I was a member of *Hastings Law Journal*, worked as a research assistant to a professor, and served as a teaching assistant in the first-year Legal Writing and Research program. After graduation, I practiced health care law for about five years in San Francisco law firms and also worked as in-house counsel for a large health care system.

Over time, I grew increasingly dissatisfied with the demands of practicing law and found myself thinking seriously about a career change. I enjoyed legal research and mentoring junior attorneys, but I struggled with the long hours and the encroachments on my family life. I read a number of different books on alternative legal careers and found a tiny paragraph in the back of one book about law librarianship. I don't remember which book it was, but I do remember that the author didn't seem to find law librarianship to be a particularly exciting choice. But that didn't matter. As soon as I read the short description, I was immediately intrigued because it mentioned that teaching and research were both primary job duties for academic law librarians. I loved doing research and working as a teaching assistant in law school, and I thought that it would be great to have a job that involved both activities. I started to read everything that I could find about being a law librarian. After two weeks of research, I realized that I had found my calling.

I applied to San Jose State University's School of Library and Information Science and completed the MLIS program in May 2005. I joined the Northern California Association of Law Libraries (NOCALL) (<http://nocall.org>) and the American Association of Law Libraries (AALL) (<http://www.aallnet.org>) immediately upon starting law school. I attended my first AALL conference in Seattle in 2003, where I quickly found out just how friendly and welcoming the law librarian community could be. I still recall telling my husband how different this conference was from all of the attorney conferences that I had attended over the past few years – "People will actually talk to me and offer career advice even though I'm just a student, and there's lots of hugging!" I told him. "I think I've found my people."

During my final year of library school, I landed an internship at the University of San Francisco's Zief Law Library, which was my first significant library work experience. It was meaningful for me to work at Zief because I was a long-time patron of the USF law library as a law student and attorney. I had always admired the staff and the collection, and it was such a great experience to come back to this library to begin my new career. I worked at the reference desk, developed a plan for a faculty resources web page, and made recommendations about the library's health law and bioethics collections.

In my first job after library school, I served as the Electronic Services Reference Librarian at Santa Clara University's Heafey Law Library. I managed the library's web pages, launched an internal blog for our reference department and an external blog for our patrons, and taught advanced legal research for the first time. My teaching philosophy is simple – I try to teach my students all of the things that I wished I had known before I began practicing law. I cover traditional legal research topics such as legislative history, secondary sources, and federal and state administrative legal research, but I also include discussions about performance expectations for new attorneys, how to write solid timesheet entries, and cost-efficient research strategies.

I had a great experience at Santa Clara, but when a position opened closer to home this past year at the University of San Francisco, decided to apply and was excited to receive an offer a few months ago. I am managing the law library's online resources, overseeing our Lexis and Westlaw training, providing faculty research support, and preparing to teach Advanced Legal Research again in 2007

I'm also an active member of NOCALL and AALL, so that I can take full advantage of the supportive law librarian professional community and work to recruit others to law librarianship. I currently serve as the Co-Chair of the NOCALL Academic Relations Committee, and I'm a member of AALL's Recruitment to Law Librarianship Committee.

In a recent tribute to J. Myron Jacobstein,** Bob Berring said that Professor Jacobstein once told him that "the best thing about law librarianship was that you could give it your best but you did not have to give it your soul. Your soul was for your family." Professor Jacobstein had it exactly right. You should be able to love what you do and give it your best without having your job drain you dry. But I have to confess that, even though I don't spend long nights and weekends at the office anymore, my job has stolen a little bit of my soul – in a wonderful way. I think about new methods of teaching legal research on my daily walks in Golden Gate Park, formulate new research hypotheticals for my class in the shower, and avidly read other librarians' blogs on the weekends. I market law librarianship to law and library school students through AALL and NOCALL mentoring programs and speaking engagements. But I no longer resent the time that I spend thinking about my job "off the clock" – instead, I am immensely grateful and honored to be part of such a creative, collegial, and passionate profession.

*Reprinted with permission: Amy J. Wright, Law Librarian Blog, *Spotlight on Law Librarians: Amy Wright* (Nov. 28, 2006). The slightly longer version is available at: http://lawprofessors.typepad.com/law_librarian_blog/2006/11/spotlight_on_la.html

**Robert C. Berring, Mike Jacobstein: Truly a Giant, 97 Law Libr. J. 633, 636 (2005)

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