

Academic Exercise

By Daniel Morris, University of Kansas School of Law

I'll miss finals — the caffeinated surge that closed each semester. I'll miss the all-consuming relief of handing in that last final, knowing whole days of sleep-filled, guilt-free, unaccountable purposelessness await. I'll miss the days leading into the semester, stretching, taking a deep breath, bracing to go back, ready for the contest, ready to find the physical limit.

I'll miss — impossibly — the 24 hours, the mad flurry of finishing the paper, submitting the brief, giving the presentation, and crushing at least one of three questions on a day I wasn't even supposed to be up. I'll miss that moment when the heavens open, the stars align, and all of Creation pauses as the Socratic method becomes transparent and for one exultant moment angelic choirs sing *Te Deums* and I know perfectly: Where the professor is going, what the next question is, what the right answer is, and what the hidden trap in that answer is.

I'll miss 8 lb. casebooks.

I'll miss individual cases like old friends — quirky, infuriating, trustworthy, flaky, dense-but-goodhearted, brilliant, enigmatic, or gladly left to years ago — *Hadley v. Baxendale*, *Marbury v. Madison*, *Sherwood v. Walker*, *Erie, Palsgraf*, *Lochner*, *Mayo v. Satan*. I'll miss stunningly implausible Rules ... against Perpetuities, in *Shelly's Case*, 1. I'll miss boldly paradoxical statements of law: One who uses another's property violates a sacred interest and must be called to account, unless he uses it persistently, consistently, openly, and with utter disregard for the true owner, then the property becomes his. I'll miss random Latin and poorly pronounced French.

I'll miss free Westlaw.

I'll miss professors who care passionately about the most obscure and Byzantine provisions of law, but who also engage the broad themes and purposes of the law, who like teaching, who like their students, but who expect their students to push beyond self-imposed limits. I'll miss the look of hope hinting in professors' eyes as they see a difficult concept about to click in a student's mind. I'll miss the encouragement they offered as we then required second and third chances before getting it. I'll miss professors who model the learned, courteous, selfless professionalism for which the Bar strives.

I'll miss law review articles bluebooked to within an inch of their lives and annotated well past. I'll miss friendly rivalries with sibling publications.

I'll miss the space to scrutinize what I think the law is and what it ought to be. I'll miss reconciling codified values with their everyday impacts on people otherwise trying merely to

go about their lives. I'll miss being an informed spectator to legal debates as they raged through agencies, courts, and legislatures. I'll miss casual, wide-ranging conversations about the Constitution at Taco Bell or the rec center. I'll miss having to look behind an argument to see why it's made.

I'll miss wearing flip flops on weekdays.

I'll miss classmates and friends. I'll miss the common cause of surviving. I'll miss the impromptu escapes. I'll miss the near-campouts in Green Hall. I'll miss the long nights, barely remembered. I'll miss celebrating one another's job offers or victories or Computer-Assisted Legal Instructions or marriage or new sons or daughters. I'll miss the ready consolation for "although your credentials are impressive" letters, for the bitter end of the curve, for the unforgiving math of class rank, for fiery trainwrecks of interviews, for the painful interventions of the world beyond the law school. I'll miss coping humor. I'll miss inside jokes that, even stale, bring a chuckle three years later. I'll miss those moments when only borrowed strength kept me moving. I'll miss returning the favor, lending strength when needed. I'll miss the individuals, the characters, the people who made up each day.

And, yes, in practicing law, there will still be cases and statutes, impossible deadlines, worthwhile challenges, and achievements. There will still be the friendship of colleagues and the shared purposes of the profession. But never again as safe, the consequences of failure no longer mine alone. I'll miss the comforting security of academic exercises.

But I came to law school intending to practice law. I came, in large part, because I wanted to have an impact on my community. With the chance to make a difference comes real risk. And law school has prepared me about as much as possible to be the advocate, counselor, and professional I hope to be. ■

About the Author



Daniel Morris, Wichita, received his Bachelor of Arts in language and literature from Sterling College. He graduated from the University of Kansas School of Law in May 2009. He is sitting for the Missouri bar this summer and anticipates sitting for the Kansas bar in February 2010.