

Rachel and Adam Moses, Part Two

(As published in The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking column on August 12, 2021)

Benita Albert concludes the series featuring Rachel and Adam Moses.

Rachel and Adam Moses graduated from Oak Ridge High School (ORHS) in 1995 and 2000 respectively. Their academic and extracurricular accomplishments offered them a plethora of choices for collegiate placement as well as courses of study.

Rachel wanted a small, liberal arts college where she could know the professors and form close relationships with both faculty and friends. She chose Centre College in Danville, KY for its small-town atmosphere and rich academic and social opportunities. She majored in government with minors in mathematics and sociology. She joined the Student Congress, the Kappa Kappa Gamma sorority, and the Black Student Union to further extend her desire for diversity in friendships, and she studied abroad in London in the fall of her junior year. Rachel knew from the start that she was laying a foundational platform for a career in law.

By contrast, Adam says his future planning beyond ORHS was strongly guided by his sister except that he wanted a big city and university experience. Thus, he chose Emory University in Atlanta where, as an undergraduate, he majored in mathematics and economics and minored in history. Adam knew he would go on to graduate studies, saying: "As to my decision to practice law, my sister was probably my biggest influence. She was always the most driven person I knew, and I looked up to her career choices. From the earliest of ages, Rachel always had a clear vision of who she wanted to help and how she wanted to do it. With my sister's career arch etched firmly in my sightline, it was hard to envision doing anything else."

Rachel chose the University of Tennessee Law School (1999-2002), while Adam elected the Tulane Law School (2006-2009). Adam stated that Tulane was his first choice: "Because it was a springboard to New York City," and that fulfilled his dreams of a big city life.

Rachel, true to her heart for service, leaned toward legal aid, a program she became familiar with in law school. She wanted to be a child advocate. Citing her volunteer work with CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocate) in Anderson County under then CASA Executive Director, Cyndy Bailes, Rachel praised the valuable mentoring she was given. Ms. Bailes told her she was the first person to just call and ask to volunteer in the office to get experience with the Anderson Co. program. Rachel said the CASA office shared space with the Community Mediation Services Program, under then Director Anne Sides. Thus, Rachel also was exposed to teen-parent delinquency mediations and juvenile court.

She noted that inside UT Law School there is a legal clinic, one of the oldest in the nation. The clinic allowed aspiring lawyers the opportunity to handle real casework under supervision. Rachel moved toward an advocacy concentration, electing extra trial practice classes which she described as: "Very interactive, mock-trial like." Some of her legal clinic case assignments included child delinquency, criminal defense, unemployment issues, and domestic violence.

Rachel valued her opportunity to intern with Rural Legal Services of Tennessee (RLST), thanks to an invitation from Director Neil McBride who learned of her interest in child advocacy. In the summer of 2000, she was encouraged to apply for an internship with RLST and got the opportunity to work with an attorney to represent incarcerated juveniles in state detention. She also worked with several other attorneys at RLST on a variety of legal cases. Rachel said this work required that she study such as: commitment processing, entitlement rights, and general advocacy for the issues of poverty, housing, and consumer needs. She said, "I became the school fees waiver legal expert...even today, if a kid needs something, I pursue it."

Rachel's experiences solidified her decision to pursue legal aid as a career. Her current work with the Legal Aid Society of Middle Tennessee and the Cumberland, began in August 2002. The Society provides free legal services to needy clients, such services funded mostly via federal government grants. Since Oak Ridge had no such position available, Rachel said she chose the Cookeville-based office because of the closeness to Oak Ridge and because she had worked with and admired the strong advocacy of the lawyers who represented low-income citizens in the nearby, Upper Cumberland region counties.

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Rachel served as President of the Tennessee Bar Association of Young Lawyers from 2014-2016. Of her further professional affiliations, she wrote: "I'm no longer a 'young' lawyer, but I still serve the Tennessee Bar Association on the TBA Board of Governors as a Governor representing the middle Tennessee area east of Nashville. I'm past president of the Putnam County Bar Association and past president of the Upper Cumberland Trial Lawyers Association. I was the founder of the Upper Cumberland Young Lawyers Association. I'm a member of the Tennessee Lawyers Association for Women. She is also heavily involved in leadership roles in several service organizations, and she especially loves her role, since 2006, as committee member then Chairperson of the Rotary Youth Exchange for sixty-five clubs across East Tennessee.

I asked Rachel to describe her work: "I consider myself a generalist in the Legal Aid Society, meaning that in the eighteen years I have been an attorney, I've handled almost every type of case that we get at Legal Aid, including family law, housing law, consumer law, employment law, and public benefits. I won my first and only appeal to the Tennessee Court of Appeals in 2015 on an unemployment compensation issue for a lady who was fired while she was on medical leave and then was wrongly denied unemployment benefits when she applied after coming off leave. In 2016, I co-counseled with my , Bill Bush, in a four-day jury trial in Federal Court regarding a Family Medical Leave Act issue, but we were unsuccessful with that one.

I am currently in four 'practice groups' with my firm – The Family Law Practice Group (handling divorces and Orders of Protection for victims of domestic violence); the Health, Benefits, and Education Practice Group (handling TennCare appeals, Social Security appeals, welfare appeals, and education cases); the Tax/Bankruptcy Practice Group (handling income tax appeals and other controversies people have with the IRS); and the Consumer Practice Group (handling defense of debt collection actions)."

Adam's transition, upon earning his JD degree from Tulane, was to a clerkship with the world's largest immigration law firm, Fragomen, Del Rey, Bernsen & Loewy in 2008, later advancing to an Associate in 2009. Of this assignment, Adam wrote; "I learned the fundamentals of corporate immigration, which primarily consisted of managing visa processes for major financial institutions." Though a secure position during his three years of employment, Adam struggled with the demands of pure corporate representation while simultaneously thirsted for person-to-person representation in a more adversarial setting.

In 2013, he accepted an Associate position at Jones Fletcher PC, a small immigration upstart. He said, "I diversified my skillset from representing criminal aliens in deportation proceedings before immigration judges, to obtaining extraordinary ability visas for major players in the entertainment industry, to attending green card interviews for families and business people at U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services... My clients were nearly all blue-collar workers, the plurality of whom were from the Dominican Republic or Guyana. It was the Wild West, but I came out of it, quite literally, with a knowledge of immigration law that was broader than anyone I knew."

Adam continued. "In 2016, I made another move, this time to Wildes and Weinberg PC, one of the country's most historic immigration firms, having put the very practice of immigration law on the map with its high-profile representation of John Lennon in the 1970s. Here, I continue handling an extremely varied practice, with an elite set of clients including celebrities and major business. It's truly an amazing experience representing a culmination of everything I set out to do."

Adam loves New York City, a place he considers the apex for opportunities in immigration law, but he also decries the high cost of living and what he calls "my field's biggest challenge—profitability." His previous work in corporate immigration, by its nature, prioritized efficiency and expediency, and was thus ill-suited to his academic and highly personal approach to the law. "But, the reality is that immigrants, particularly those requiring litigation, don't have a lot of money." He describes his firm's clients as a small subset who are able to pay a decent fee.

During the past COVID-19 months, both Rachel and Adam have had to innovate, to work online, and to delay in-person court dates. Rachel said, "Special education casework has been delayed...we've had a boatload of people not getting funds and needing child care services." She feared increases in domestic violence petitions, and she has seen more divorce requests. As of March 13, 2020, only emergency hearings for domestic violence have been allowed. The court

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opened proceedings on a limited basis in June 2020, but the backed-up caseload is daunting. Rachel summarized this time: "It is exhausting. I feel busier than ever. If I am not in court, I'm working overtime at home."

As I like to do, I asked Rachel if she could share her advice to students considering a career in law. Snippets of her candid answer follow. "Getting as much experience as possible in different law environments is crucial. Get involved in work study programs. Volunteer in such as CASA or in a law office. Legal clinic (I felt) was so important—there is value in handling cases, getting involved in law school projects, and pairing with practicing attorneys for real-world client experience...The earlier you schedule practicums the better...Once you start law school, unless you volunteer, the actual classes don't give you the 'in court' feel."

Once on the job, Rachel proffers: "Being a lawyer is not a 9-to-5 job. Your work is on your mind 24/7. Your work can be overwhelming, so be sure you can disconnect. Lawyers work with people in crisis, and this requires compassion."

Both Rachel and Adam have the humanity, intelligence, and drive to be highly effective and successful practitioners of their law specialties. Their interest in the underserved and disenfranchised, and their compassionate legal representation is an inspiration. I am left with great admiration for their work, with pride in their accomplishments, and with gratitude for these former Oak Ridge students who are now out in the world and making it a better place.

Thank you, Benita, for yet another excellent insight in the tremendous accomplishments of two really great lawyers from Oak Ridge. We are proud of them!



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