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The Department of Children's Service, or DCS, is commonly known as a government organization dedicated to the welfare and protection of children. In reality, however, it is much more than this. The department strives, first and foremost, for the unification of families. The DCS branch in Tullahoma Tennessee is not glamorous; far from it. As a legal intern working for the department attorney, James Stephens, I was initially thrown off by this fact. Though not entirely sure of what to expect, I did have a vague vision of leather-bound books and a highly polished mahogany desk. I expected to attend court a few times a week, the likes of which would make the set designer of Law and Order proud. Such visions were, of course, rather naive, but I did not know what else to expect. This was, however, the lesson of the summer; the world of adulthood rarely adheres to one's expectations.

My fellow intern, Annie, and I were surprised by the immediacy with which we were plunged into the deep end. Rather than sorting mail or filing paperwork, we quickly became involved in the various cases. We learned how to draft petitions and a number of other court documents. It was quite the learning process, and I am sure Mr. Stephens must have had to completely redraft a few botched attempts at legal documents in those early weeks. While Annie and I were legal interns, Mr. Stephens wanted to expose us to the other divisions within the department. In addition to legal, there were the Child Protective Services, Juvenile Justice, and Family Social Services. We helped these groups in various ways, especially by sorting through documents such as medical and educational records and noting anything of relevance within them to a particular case.

Our first day of court was terrifying. The building was ugly and the stereotypical white marble columns were noticeably absent. The court room itself was absolutely frigid. And yet, everything seemed to click that day. Mr. Stephens invited the two of us to sit with him, past the bar which separates those involved in the proceedings from the observers. We were not merely observers, and the thought was electrifying. We knew the details of the cases and had even helped in their construction. At this moment the fruits of our work -though minuscule in comparison to that of those who actually worked in the department- took form and substance. From that moment on, Annie and I felt a personal connection to our cases. We felt a certain attachment to each of the families and were devoted to their well being. This being said, Mr. Stephens warned us that a degree of detachment was necessary; consuming and whole-hearted devotion could be dangerous to all parties. Nevertheless, the purpose that came from this experience was unlike anything I had ever felt before.

I have toyed with the idea of becoming a lawyer since I was thirteen years old. While the idea has been inconsistent, often deviating in the direction of publishing, I have always returned to it. At the same time, I have also been plagued by chronic feelings of inadequacy. The fear of failure seems to have the effect of raising standards –of all kinds- to impossible levels. This was the state of my mind before my experience with DCS. I was in the process of recovering from a slew of health problems. As a consequence, my grades, while certainly not bad, had suffered. Additionally, I had become a bit antisocial, due to the many weeks of just not feeling well enough to enter the public sphere. I felt inadequate- in every sense. My expectations of judicial glamour reaffirmed this feeling.

Many people with similar expectations as myself might have found that first day anticlimactic. I, however, appreciated the dose of realism it provided. The world beyond Sewanee is the source of terror for many, myself at the forefront. It seems not only impossible, but rather bleak. Before my experience with DCS, I felt that I would inevitably become a drone in the workforce. I knew I would try my hand at law school, but I never expected to succeed. Even if I did, however, I did not feel that I would be particularly good at being a lawyer. I knew that I had the necessary skills, as well as the desire, but my feelings of inadequacy deprived me of the self-assurance and drive. However, when that first court scene unfolded before me I began to feel a change in myself. I saw how my involvement made a difference, and that I was far from inadequate. I experienced firsthand that the 'real world' was just that- real. It was not grey and joyless, nor was it glamorous, although it held potential for both. My time with the DCS brought me hope for my life after Sewanee.