

Mallory Park

Tonya Public Affairs Board

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A Summer Beyond Expectation

As I ventured away from the mountain and toward my little hometown of Lewisburg, Tennessee, I was happy but apprehensive about what awaited me. I knew that I had an internship that many people would be jealous of, but I had no clue what exactly I would be doing. Our local Juvenile/General Sessions judge had taken a chance and offered me an internship based only upon a reference by a local lawyer and my Facebook profile. I knew I had to prove myself by tackling whatever Judge Bowles decided to throw at me.

My first day in the Marshall County courthouse was an interesting one to say the least. Finally meeting Judge Bowles in person, I was delighted to find that she was a young professional who, while taking her job seriously, also used her sense of humor to her advantage. Judge Bowles explained that what she wanted me to take away from the internship and time in her office was not so much the specific laws and legal procedures, but more of the impact of lawyers and judges on those that were forced into the courtroom by a variety of circumstances. That is when I knew, Judge Bowles understood what I wanted but had not been able to articulate – a chance to decide if law was the right career path for me.

During my time with Judge Bowles I was able to observe court on Mondays and Tuesdays, with Mondays being devoted to juvenile matters. Those were the days that impacted me the most. Seeing the children in situations that were less than ideal struck

a chord in me and spurred me to inquire about the laws that governed juvenile proceedings. When I began to ask Judge Bowles at length about these things, she gave me an assignment that sparked a month-long project. She was on a committee that had been tasked with revamping Tennessee juvenile court laws. I spent weeks reading and learning about not only Tennessee laws, but also juvenile court laws of Georgia, Florida, and Alabama. Every chance we would get Judge Bowles and I would discuss the pros and cons of each state. At the end of my time with the judge I was told that changes were still being made to the drafts, but the committee hoped to finalize juvenile legal code soon. While I know that I individually could not make an impact to those children I saw in the courtroom, I hope that my opinions and suggestions made to that committee through the judge did help children in the future.

In addition to the long-term research project, I was also constantly doing research for the judge's more in-depth cases. I quickly learned to brief legal cases so that the judge could quickly know what the respective lawyers were referring to in the courtroom as well as what other judges and courts before her had deemed necessary in certain situations. While briefing cases definitely gave me much insight into what the lawyers were referencing and practical experience for law school, the most interesting point of the summer and the internship came in July.

During the latter part of the summer a huge trial took place in Marshall County. A rarity for the area, a murder trial, began the third week of July. Bessie Kay Colvett had been killed, but the case was not necessarily cut and dry – even with a confession by the defendant, Kenneth Colvett. Observing the trial from the very beginning, even jury

selection, gave me insight about both the legal practices of criminal trials as well as myself. Points of the trial were so engrossing that I found myself staying in the courtroom until the end of each day, sometimes continuing until six in the evening. Twists and turns in the case threw everyone for loops, including the absence of the defendants DNA or fingerprints on the murder weapon, as well as a request for a mistrial after almost 3 full weeks of proceedings! These surprises, while enthralling, solidified what I had begun to believe...that I wanted to concentrate not on criminal law, but on juvenile or educational law.

I have always been a person who enjoys working with children, but lack the patience needed to be a teacher. Also, I have a parent who is involved greatly in the school system and I have spent my life watching teachers struggle with the legal constraints placed upon them. During the course of my internship I was able to observe two days devoted specifically to those parents whose children were truant from school. It was during those two days that I saw just one of the issues that schools and the legal system face when interacting. Parents who refused to send their children to school because of bogus reasons faced legal consequences, but the children were still left vulnerable because the punishments for parents were not severe enough to make the parents fix the underlying issues. Those families were often seen time after time in court because it was obvious that the only punishment would be community service. The school system could not do much at all other than provide the name of the truant child and his/her parents. This is just one example of a problem that deserves more attention

and more open communication on the ends of both the legal system and the educational system.

My summer experience as an intern for Judge Lee Bowles made my decision all the more clear and sparked a passion in me. I want now to not only become a lawyer, but a lawyer who specializes handling educational issues. I want to represent not the everyday parent who can't be bothered to get their kid to school, but the school system as a whole. I want to represent the principals who bear the brunt of parental anger when the blame belongs to another. I want to represent the teachers who are told that their pay will be determined by state officials who have never taught a day in their lives and only have meaningless test scores to go by with no attention to demographics. I want to represent the students who are made to become mindless little robots and do exactly as the state says. I want to represent the gifted students who are ignored because all the attention, materials, and technology is focused on children with lower IQs all in the name of leaving no child behind and leveling the playing field. Someone needs to speak for them all, and I learned this summer that I want that person to be me.