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'Tell them you swore you would never wear a tie'

By **ROBERT L. BRENNA JR.**
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I called my daughter, who recently graduated from Park School of Communication at Ithaca College, to let her know I had been asked to do this column.

I needed advice. How do I get started, now that I've been thinking about it for weeks? What should I write about for my first column?

It's a strange feeling when you realize that you are at a point in life when you ask your kid for advice. As usual, she was great.

"Just write about yourself, Dad. Let it be an introduction, so your readers will know who you are. People take more interest in reading about what someone has to say when they know more about the author."

Sage advice.

"Tell them you weren't sure you wanted to be a lawyer when you were in college at Syracuse, and that you swore you would never wear a tie. I always get a kick out of that."

She always did find that ironic. Even though I've always loved the law, what it stands for and can accomplish, there was a point in my life when I would have laughed at anyone who told me that, someday, I would have a closet full of courtroom attire.

Before going to law school, I was a drummer, because that was what I loved. I was studying psych and pre-med, and toying with all kinds of ideas about life. My first job was working in a small electronics assembly plant.

After a while, I found work in a hospital's psych department. I moved to Boston and lived in what was politely called a neighborhood that was being "re-gentrified." I was supposedly playing in a band for a living, but that barely bought food.

I also worked at Massachusetts Rehab Hospital, at one of the country's first pain clinics, lived in a brownstone with my dog and a few college buddies, and tried to sort it all out. I worked my rent down to \$25 a month by helping to rehab the brownstone. After a while, music became like a job

and I started yearning for school again. Even if I wasn't going to practice, I knew I wanted to go to law school. I knew I needed the intellectual challenge.

Although I'm only 28, this coming May will mark 30 years since I graduated from law school.

When I was four or five years old, life was easy. I knew I was going to be a lawyer, and there were no doubts. In fact, when my cousin asked if I wanted to be an alter boy when I got older, I started crying and said "No. I want to be a lawyer like my Daddy."

If only everything were that straightforward and black and white now. After the age of five, things became increasingly complicated.

But, there is comfort in knowing that the next generation is there for me. My wife and I joke about the fact that the geography and history lobes of my brain never developed to the point of being even marginally functional. Luckily, my 20-year-old son knows more about when and which civilizations flourished over another, what battles led to the language and cultural changes on most of the globe, and many obscure facts the busy workday seems to keep me from learning.

I love the law. I love the fact that when the weight of the world is on someone's back, they turn to me, out of all the people on the entire planet, to help make it right and to seek justice in an unjust world.

But, at the end of it all, when I try to sort it all out — which I still occasionally have to do — it's a strange feeling asking your kids for advice.



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