

JOHN-PAUL BOYD ('99)

When many of us reflect on the contribution our education made to our career, a classroom comes to mind—a course that opened our eyes or a professor that took an interest in nurturing our passions. For JP Boyd, a family-law attorney at Aaron Gordon & Daykin, his work outside the classroom holds special significance.

As a volunteer for the Law Students' Legal Advice Program (LSLAP), the school's long-running legal advice program operated by law students, Boyd saw the need to demystify the legal process.

"LSLAP was probably what kept me in law school," he says, "because I really enjoyed helping people and the hands-on kind of issues that I was dealing with. Most clients are plucked out of nothingness and stuck in this monolithic and massively complicated system that nobody explains to you. All you know is that you've been handed this slip of paper and told that you have to go to court on that particular date, but there's no idea of why you're doing that, or what the consequences are, or what's going to happen on that day."

Boyd's experience with LSLAP had a profound impact on how he views legal access for the average citizen. It led him to champion the role of an attorney as one who educates his clients rather than litigating on their behalf. He was struck by his clients' ignorance about the legal system and the lack of clear information available.

"I was at the BC Supreme Court just a while ago, and they have all these fantastic pamphlets available on family law issues, but they're all in French. I'm sure they ran out of the English ones, but that's kind of what the system is like, you know? There's certain information available but it's often difficult to get and it's not broadly accessible."

His desire to increase access to legal information—particularly in the area of family law—led Boyd to create the BC Family Law Resource, a not-for-profit website that provides plain-language summaries of legal issues for people involved in family disputes.

"People really have some messed up ideas about family law, mostly drawn from American TV and films and John Grisham novels. But just like the criminal justice system, there's no public education that tells you 'this is what custody means', 'this is what exigible asset means', 'this is what happens if you live with somebody in a marriage-like relationship for a period in excess of two years'. Nobody tells you that there's a difference between the property rights that are obtained through a marriage as opposed to a common law couple that have been together for twenty years."

A Toronto native, Boyd took a circuitous path to law school, following in his younger sister's footsteps after his own less-than-stellar educational origins (he flunked out of high school,



completing his degree in what he calls "the purgatory of night school" while earning a fine-arts diploma from the Ontario College of Art). Boyd soon reinvented himself as a philosophy student, earning his bachelor and master degrees at the University of Guelph.

With a background in speculative epistemology—and a realization of its limits in real-world application—Boyd applied to law schools he felt would be a good fit for his left-leaning politics. He admits he settled on UBC because Vancouver was the best place to drive his motorcycle year-round. He quickly fell in love with the area and made it his home after graduating in 1999. Today he lives in Maple Ridge with his wife Heather and daughter Morgan.

Since his graduation, he has chalked up an impressive array of recognition. Besides serving as an associate with Aaron Gordon & Daykin, he is a member of the British Columbia Law Institute's board of directors, the editorial board of the Continuing Legal Education Society's *British Columbia Family Practice Manual*, the board of directors of the British Columbia Parenting Coordinators Roster, the Association of Family and Conciliation Courts, the Attorney General's *Family Relations Act* review advisory committee, and the National Council on Family Relations.

The BC Family Law Resources website has earned him nationwide recognition, and was at least partly responsible for his receipt of the 2003 national Pro Bono Service Award from the Canadian Bar Association, the 2006 inaugural Distinguished Service Award for individual lawyers from Pro Bono Law British Columbia and Pro Bono Law Ontario and the 2008 Outstanding Young Alumnus

Award from the UBC Law Alumni Association. Boyd is humbled at times, hearing reports of lawyers arriving in court with printouts from his website or judges citing his work in the courtroom.

While he is happy to have made such an impact, he is eager to maintain the focus of his pro-bono work as a public service to address the dearth of information for those seeking to resolve family matters.

"We've got stopgap measures like Access Justice, the Salvation Army's pro-bono program, and Pro-Bono Law British Columbia, which do a great job," says Boyd, "but they're still sort of half-way points, and they're not a complete solution to the problem. We need duty counsel. We need lawyers that are immediately available in the court house. Legal information from a website or a pamphlet is no substitute for proper legal advice. Family is the core of our

economy, it's the core of our social organization, it's so terribly important. But our public schools don't talk about the consequences of family breakdown and the obligations which survive the termination of the spousal or parental relationship."

Boyd speaks fondly of his own family—a stability he seem to want to confer on others.

"I enjoy being able to make a concrete, meaningful, real difference in somebody's life," he says. "I like making my clients laugh. I like solving their problems. I love being able to give them good news or to help them work through a really difficult time. It's tremendously gratifying in a way that I don't think I would be gratified handling a shareholder's grievance or something like that. Family law is very personal." ●

Profile

by Mary Milstead

AMBER PRINCE ('05)

Four years ago, Amber Prince thought she might spend the summer working at Hastings Race Track in Vancouver. She had recently graduated from UBC Law and was planning to start the Master's in Law program at the University of Victoria.

"I didn't do the traditional route, summering at a law firm, articling and carrying on from there," says Prince. "I didn't have a clear sense of direction for myself, and I was hesitant to work at a big firm."

A lifelong lover of horses, she landed the job at the track instead. However, things did not work out quite the way she planned.

"Unfortunately, I only lasted about a day," Prince laughs. "It was not a good fit. There was a lot of hard physical labor involved."

Instead she accepted an opportunity to work as a summer student for Atira Women's Resource Society. Founded in the 1980s, Atira is a not-for-profit organization committed to ending violence against women through providing direct service as well as working to increase awareness of and education around the scope and impact of that violence on communities.

The position at Atira was a better fit. "I think of myself as being a left-leaning feminist of Aboriginal heritage," says Prince. "My philosophies are in line with Atira's and my outlook informs all of my work with women." Although she was not aware that this type of work existed when she was a law student, she grew into it with the help of her colleagues. Halfway through her master's program, she was offered the position of Legal Advocate for Atira. She accepted.



As Atira's Legal Advocate, Prince's mandate is to provide legal assistance and support services for marginalized women. She helps them navigate the often overwhelming legal system, primarily in areas considered "poverty-law," such as residential tenancy law, income law, human rights law, WCP appeal and income assistance appeal. Prince also provides support services, including attendance at family or criminal court when guidance and personal support are needed, and providing referrals for legal services outside her jurisdiction.