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Class of 1983 Fifteen Year Report Alumni Comments

University of Michigan Law School

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**CLASS OF 1983: RESPONSES TO QUESTION F: "WE WOULD LIKE YOUR
ADDITIONAL COMMENTS OF ANY SORT ABOUT LIFE OR LAW SCHOOL."**

Life: I believe we have succeeded in reducing our moral and intellectual aspirations to nothing more than what is needed to write the script for an afternoon soap opera.

It is time for men of all persuasions to wake up, before it's too late, before we lose our civilized life.

Law School itself was a good experience for me, Diminished somewhat by the premature birth of my first child in February of my second year. His medical problems meant I was somewhat distanced from school in my last year. My judicial clerkship was fabulous, making me believe that teaching was a viable option. My five years of practice was not fun, and I am much happier in academia. If I couldn't teach, law would not be a happy career for me.

Having a degree from U. of M. law school has served me well in the eyes of others because of the credibility and prestige it lends.

Leaving litigation was the best move I've made. I was fortunate to become involved in the ADR field where I find the work far more satisfying and productive.

The practice of law has not been as intellectually stimulating for me as law school was, and I regret that I miss it. Law School didn't provide us with much practical information, e.g. about litigation – I never saw a complaint till I clerked. I don't at all regret going to law school, or going to U-M specifically, but it wasn't until I was out that I was able to admit to myself how unhappy I was in law school. There's not anything the school can do about this – it's just a strange experience, and unfortunately it lasts 3 years.

I am proud of the Law School and it has helped me to prosper in life.

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I have a great life. Law School was a better educational opportunity than I knew at the time. My interaction with other attorneys constantly shows how strong of a foundation of legal knowledge I acquired during my tenure at the U of M.

I think the alumni magazine is excellent.

....I got my law degree as an insurance policy since I anticipated that I would be in and out of the work force as I wanted to raise a family. I had to "cash in" that policy under circumstances I never expected. I feel blessed to have the Michigan Law degree, which directly opened doors to my current firm and a job I really enjoy. I know that I will be able to put my four children through college and support them in the meantime, which is a tremendous relief and source of satisfaction.

I loved U of M and found the intellectual challenge stimulating. It did not prepare me for the constant strain of balancing family and professional life. I found it necessary to leave corporate law (which was the focus of the law school) and take a substantial pay cut at a government job. Even that move was not sufficient and I went part time. Eventually my job became more frustrating because of politics and I left since the upsides were greatly outnumbered by the down-sides (affecting family to be involved in politics battles not of my creation, etc.). Currently I have no desire to return to work and have involved myself in local political issues, am president of the PTO, organized art shows in our school, and a leader of a Brownie group and a committee member and chair of a cub scout pack.

Law School was a great social experience, but not as practical as it should have been. More emphasis on clinics would have been better.

Practicing law will never be my passion. Too much on making money for those who already have too much. It simply pays the bills to allow me and my family to travel and restore old houses.

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I graduated and started with a firm in 1983. Both U of M and my firm taught me not to try my cases in the press. A lawyer had "no comment" and made his/her points to a judge or jury.

Now I can't watch the news without some schmuck attorney pontificating from the court house steps. I suspect the pendulum has swung so far that a client could sue a lawyer for malpractice in failing to address the press.

Last time I checked, it wasn't about popularity, money, self-esteem or how you were abused as a child or mis-treated by society. It was about finding the true facts and properly applying the law. We have taken vigorous/aggressive representation too far and the result is lack of respect for bar, bench and the entire system of justice.

Law school was pretty brutal for me. I'm not a social animal so I didn't join study groups and I pretty much got clobbered the first year. In the second and third years I figured out how the game was played and fought my way back to the middle of the class but I remained socially isolated. I'll be 40 years old next month and the truth is I really haven't made a single friend since high school. That's sad and it's strictly my fault but if I can only make one comment about life it's that it would have been nice if somebody (other than the wife I found at age 30, and the daughter that arrived at age 34) had worked with me to change and open up.

More emphasis should be placed during law school on exploring alternatives to traditional private law firm settings.

Attorneys with whom I deal are often arrogant. They have an extremely high opinion of themselves and their contribution to society.

I for one am embarrassed at the fact that attorneys in the White House, including the President and First Lady, are using legal process and obstacles to obstruct obtaining the truth. They, and their legal staff, give lawyers and the legal process a bad name.

The jury system is vastly overrated as a means of obtaining justice. Plaintiffs' lawyers are exploiting the system for selfish and socially detrimental purposes.

When it is all said and done, the best thing we can do is raise our children to be honest, productive members of society. We must never lose sight of that.

Michigan was a tremendous experience and I value it highly especially since I have been away.

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I appreciate the bonds I have with the University Law School and look back fondly on my years there and draw strength from my association to it. It has helped my self-esteem and also encourages me to be a better person, lawyer, advocate and father in the Michigan tradition. I am now chairman of the board of the local Family Focus (or will be in one month).

I am very proud and happy to have obtained my law degree from the University of Michigan. If I could do it all over again, however, these are some of the things that I would do differently and why:

1) I would have enjoyed my college experience more by attending more college/law school and social functions, getting to know more of the faculty and my fellow students, and taking the time to make more friends. Like most people, I learned too late that my college years (and even the difficult law school years) were some of the best years of my life. I wish I had enjoyed those years to their fullest and had taken advantage of the opportunity to meet the many interesting people (both students and faculty) that were there.

2) Prior to attending law school I would have taken a job in a law firm or otherwise educated myself as to what the practice of law would be like so that I would have known what a miserable profession it could be. Coming from a background in which I did not have any friends or relatives who were lawyers, I did not know what I was getting into. Unfortunately the law school did not provide the kind of practical information necessary to prepare me for the realities of practicing law.

3) Although it is possible (not likely) that I would have attended law school (because having a legal education has been invaluable for many reasons other than providing me with employment), I either would not have become a practicing attorney or I would have saved ALL of my income for the first few years so that I would have had the option to stop practicing if I did not enjoy it and to pursue something else while I was still young enough to take advantage of my other talents and options. Unfortunately, like many impoverished law students, after graduating I became a victim of my own monetary success. I quickly began compensating for my dissatisfaction with the long hard hours of work by spending my newly found wealth and plunging myself deeply into debt. By the time I realized that I did not really enjoy practicing law, I was so far in debt that I had no choice but to continue practicing law to pay for my lifestyle. By the time I made enough money to buy my way out, I was too old (in my mind anyway) to take another career path.

In light of the foregoing, I have thought about pursuing a new career as a guest speaker at law schools throughout the country to tell law schools about the realities of the practice and to make them aware of the dangers of jumping too quickly into the legal profession. Maybe I could keep some of them from making the same mistakes that I (and so many others) did.

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I was groped and discriminated against at both law firms I worked at and saw lots of other women lawyers and not lawyers suffer the same. People are afraid to speak out for fear of ruining their career by making waves. I saw many women act like Nazi Concentration camps guards and take part in or condone discriminatory behavior so they could keep their job/power as a token woman!

You've missed something important – How much time do I spend giving legal advice or counseling to people regardless of personal income, position or potential for publicity. The legal profession has earned its low status in society by its pre-occupation with putting money ahead of being humane and considerate. This survey seems like another rapid attempt to collect statistics instead of looking below the surface.

I have strongly improved my work success and family satisfaction by working on improving personal skills in areas of reading, public speaking and learning skills. Law School gave me the resources to earn a living, but I found it easier to learn new areas of law and easier to deal with clients and other attorneys by developing a reputation for intelligence and for good comprehension of the areas of law that I was practicing.

I believe that students should be given more details on law as a business when employed as a real practitioner.

I am amazed at some of the changes at the law school. In 1983, we students fought to keep the few clinical offerings. Now, there is a public interest placement program, a smorgasbord of clinics and more student publications.

Unfortunately, with the cost of school and the predominance of loans over grants in aid, fewer students of limited means can afford to do public interest work. Perhaps few of middling means as well. Loan forgiveness programs need to be strengthened, so that the schools' commitment to social relevancy is not just another collection of course offerings, lists of non-profit employers, and trendy administrative job titles. Corporate bottom-line values still prevail, crushing the idealism of young lawyers. Loan forgiveness and public interest scholarships need to be highlighted in fund raising efforts.

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Partly because of my legal aid career track, I have been unable to give to the school. I have also been indifferent to the vanity lectures and luncheons. The articles and profiles in Quadrangle Notes relating to public service are encouraging, however, I have only given to SFF, and that was in law school. I shall not always be unable to contribute. Can you pitch to the alums who belonged to BLSA, WLSA, LA RAZA National Lawyers Guild, Environmental Law Society, etc.? A little can go a long way, to make a start in public interest possible.

I continued to feel that Michigan prepared me well for the working world. The practice of law has not been particularly satisfying for me, but the older I get the more career options outside the law I see that I have.

I still think U of M was a wonderful place to go to Law School. Best: Susan Eklund's warmth and intelligence, Ed Cooper's kindness to 1L's, the faculty's collegial model for professional exchange. These remain my ideal.

U of M Law School was a great education. I greatly enjoyed the law school experience.

Even though I did not enjoy the practice of law, I thoroughly enjoyed law school. After three years of practice, I moved to a business career, which I find much more satisfying and constructive. I still solve problems, and the intellectual challenge is perhaps greater for me. Creative jobs and value in society are more rewarding than achievements in law.

In retrospect although I enjoyed most of my law school classes, I found that the almost total emphasis on classroom/case study method to be less than optimally useful, even though I am an appellate attorney, Law School should be structured more like medical school with more clinical and practical work and problem solving. The co-op program at Northeastern strikes me

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as a more useful and valid for training lawyers than the traditional approach at Michigan. The traditional law school curriculum, with its academic and classroom orientation, primarily serves the needs of the faculty because it frees them for substantial research and writing time. Law School faculty write for each other, not for practitioners or even courts, private business, or government agencies. With so many mediocre practicing lawyers, (although not many from the prestigious law schools, I suppose) legal educators in this country should critically examine their enterprise.

Keep up the good work – despite market pressure, alumni pressures, pressures from whatever source – don't abandon your "liberal arts" approach to the law (i.e., courses in the history, philosophy, literary aspects, etc. of the law).

I enjoy the work that I do – but I enjoy it more because I learned law at a great university instead of a trade school.

I regret that I did not receive more training in the practice of law.

I hold four jobs – partner, professor, author and television host. Because of this variety I am eager to continue working. Law students should seek, and law schools should help them prepare for careers that are multi-faceted. The law is a platform on which many endeavors can stand. The balanced life, and thus the happy one, cannot be achieved doing only one thing well for 50 years.

I have yet to see any comprehensive training program from scuba diving to carpentry to fire-fighting to teaching secondary education that does not make a central place for practical real-life simulations of the principles taught -- except for the law schools.

U of M cheerfully sends law students into the world, many if not most of whom have never drafted a simple will or been inside a courtroom. U of M is very good at training very good law students. It does not even try to train good lawyers. I guess the idea is that we will actually learn the profession in a sort of big-firm apprenticeship program. Which is fine if you

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want to be a highly paid wage slave at a big firm. But I thought that pursuing a profession meant that I wouldn't have to work for someone else. Silly me!

Is it really beneath the U of M to prepare its graduates for some of the real-world applications they will surely face? And I don't mean appellate argument; of all the things a trial lawyer is obligated to do, arguing to a group of septuagenarians is the least likely and least rewarding.

One of the raging criticisms of American education is that high school doesn't prepare kids for college, vocational education doesn't prepare students for the workplace, etc. I plan, at my admittedly very humble level to do something about it. You all are educators, how about you?

My biggest regret about my legal education is that I went to law school immediately after I graduated with my A.B. from U of M. I think if I had taken time off after my undergraduate years, I would have been more focused about what I really would like to do professionally.

Having 2 young children (6 and 2) puts practicing law in its proper perspective. I'm no longer a workaholic!

The ability to juggle career, raising children and maintaining a relationship with a spouse is a major challenge! And stress-inducing for me, my wife and children. There is always the feeling that you are inadequately performing all three of these endeavors.

Employers need to be increasingly flexible to allow men and women employees to work reduced hours, if desired, especially when raising young children. We will then have a society filled with happier adults and children. Children in particular would have greater self-esteem, be better educated, and enjoy more fully developed brains.

Training in Law School very valuable in current business life. However, most lawyers I deal with are an embarrassment to the profession, moronic, unethical, deal breaking etc. – no concept of: a) Business b) moral behavior. Conflict resolution not big on most agendas – very frustrating – things usually get back on track in deals when I inform others that I went to U of M Law – Thank You.

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I did not learn to be a lawyer at Michigan. I emerged from law school with no substantial skills and have not done well in my career. I was completely unprepared for the dog eat dog nature of the practice and the sexism in the profession. Last but not least, I have not found the Michigan Degree to be helpful in job hunting.

The only good thing is that I made some good friends. The student body is far too conservative and midwestern!

My experiences not typical as I attended law school late in life (43) after a medical condition (back) forced me to give up a former profession (dentistry). I thus practiced law for only a short time (10 years) mainly by default.

While law had its rewarding moments, if I have to choose over again I would still probably pick dentistry or medicine for a career.

The best advice I ever received regarding the practice of law is that "The new rule is that there are no rules." I marvel at the changes in the profession I have witnessed in the (relatively) short time I have practiced.

Unfortunately, too many of the changes have been negative, viz., the tendency to view the practice of law strictly as a business rather than a profession with business attributes, the loss of collegiality within the profession and even within law firms.

In retrospect my law school experience was, overall, quite exceptional and enjoyable. However, the law school and the alumni association should do several things to increase the value of a Michigan education, and exploit its assets. First, there should be an on-line program for Michigan law school grads to both exchange information and job opportunities nationwide. The value of such a system is obvious. Second, you might consider inviting visiting practitioners to lunch-time lectures which discuss some of the practicalities of practice, (i.e. client development in the value of a career in federal government or the judiciary). Third, you might consider inviting minority alumni to return and discuss some of the special issues which will confront minority law students. One of the questions at the beginning of this questionnaire concerns mentors, especially a recognition of the importance this relationship plays in the professional development of young lawyers. All too often, the relationship is missing in the life of a young minority attorney, whether in private practice or in other areas. Throughout my career

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I have had excellent mentors. (In private practice the senior, named partner of my firm invited a client to take his business elsewhere, when he balked at having a minority attorney handle his case, which I won.) The minority alumni association should co-organize a nationwide listing of those alumni which are wishing to participate in such a program, and certainly would.

I am still in touch, close touch, with a surprising number of people I met at Michigan Law, given our geographical dispersion and the amount of time that has passed since we lived in the same place.

Michigan law did excellent job of selecting a group of people to come together for a time from among whom I was able to make a significant number of life-long friends!

For that alone I am deeply grateful (though what I learned at Michigan Law School has also stood me in very good stead!) I just don't think I would have learned that much without the quality of the colleagues around me.

I was extremely intimidated when I first started at Michigan Law, on a social standing alone, especially, I had never seen such a sea of blue blazers and khaki pants before, as on our first day for orientation! But by the time I left, very little fazed me any more – neither money nor merit, and I never confused the two!

I have discovered over the past few years that a job that suits me the best must fit with my personality. I found that a legal career did fit well with my personality. I do not like being in adversarial positions or "confrontational" situations. I found that I do not like being responsible for other people's problems.

On the other hand, I like being in a job where I work together in a team environment to develop, new creative products. Therefore, my job as an acquisitions editor in legal publishing suits me well.

If I had to choose whether I would go again to law school, I would not go. Yet, law school was a wonderful experience for me socially. I made life-long friends with people that I admire. For the most part, the people that I met at law school were intelligent, high caliber individuals.

More stressful & time consuming than anticipated. Hard to balance work and home life but do it by sacrificing sleep.

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Law School must continually emphasize the larger community responsibilities of lawyers. If we lose this tradition, we lose what gives the law a unique and valuable place in our society.

Legal training is great preparation for many different jobs and for coping with life in general. But, many courses in law school are totally irrelevant to those skills. It would be much more effective if law school were a 2 year program, with a required 1 year internship (a/k/a residency – see the MD model) for licensing – a low pay internship, but still positive cash flow compared to tuition. At least a basic course in accounting should be required. Understanding financial statements and budgets is necessary even to litigators, and especially so for any big bucks lawyers to manage their own affairs.

Great experience, minor suggestions: 1) More writing – much more training in writing and editing. 2) More faculty contact in smaller groups; informal dinner; discussions.

Michigan was a wonderful place to attend law school. I made friends for life and enjoyed most every aspect of the law school experience. Let me add these caveats, however: both at the time I attended and in hindsight, the quality of classroom instruction was uneven. Good scholars do not necessarily make good teachers.

Additionally, even in the early '80's I was troubled by the degree law school was becoming politicized, and the traditional law school canon yielding to interest-group focused instruction and activities. In reading law quadrangle notes over the years and visiting the campus occasionally, these trends seem to have accelerated.

Finally, in looking back at the third year of law school, I am increasingly convinced that third year – particularly second semester when most graduating students have gotten jobs and tuned out from the classroom experience – should be structured away from simply more Socratic classroom teaching. I'm not sure what should replace it, but something needs to be done to make these "dog days" of law school more engaging.

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Michigan did not provide enough opportunities to expose students to public interest work, nor did it support students who chose to pursue that area of work. The focus of the law school was far too corporate-oriented. The school was satisfied with filling major law firms with its graduates, who are then content to lead a life pursuing the goal of accumulating personal wealth without questioning the social value of their endeavors. Any school should strive to promote diverse career paths, including a corporate practice. But Michigan verged on intolerance toward any paths other than the corporate firm. I hope this has changed over the last 15 years.

I'm happy with the education I got in law school and find that friendships I didn't expect to last beyond graduation have endured, which is as good a place to spend 3 years as any.

As good as the education was, I don't think its quality would suffer from a little less arrogant cruelty, and a little more effort to clarify what's being studied. What I disliked most of all about law school was the mentality that an interest or point of view was an undesirable interference with the lawyer's duty to do what they've hired to do. I think that results in a lot of the detachment law students fall into. A little passion wouldn't hurt the profession.

Law School was good, being a lawyer is better, I sure don't miss those blue books.

I very much enjoy practicing law. I also enjoy practicing in a large law firm, even though big firms are often criticized, I find the work very interesting and challenging. (I worked at a small firm, and did not like it). However, if I had to do it over, I'm not sure I would become a lawyer, the law is a very male-oriented and old-fashioned profession in its approach to career track expectations. I have managed to work "part-time" throughout my career, which has coincided with the time I have been raising my children. I am happy to have made the choice to have time with them, but it has been a constant struggle to get professional recognition and be considered an important part of wherever I'm working. Plus, since I have been "off-track" for so long, and there is just one career path at firms (7-8 years working outrageous hours early in your career and then the "plum" of partnership), that I will probably never be considered "successful" in the traditional sense. In this way, I have felt some discrimination as a woman, not because of overt bad attitudes, but because of a lack of recognition that women in particular need more time to raise children, and career tracks need to change to meet that need.

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More counseling/mentoring/support for women so that they know the obstacles they will face when they practice.

Law school is very egalitarian in its treatment of women but this leaves us unprepared for what happens in the real world.

Teach women that this prejudice is real. Judges, lawyers, clients, everywhere! It exists!

We must know how to deal with it. It's the first hurdle to overcome in every encounter, before we can ever begin to practice law.

1) My experience suggests that a law degree is highly empowering for one who is seeking to effect social change.

2) Law school is however, too long, unnecessarily pressurized, and overly focused on traditional legal corporate practice – to the exclusion of public service opportunities. I would encourage efforts to promote alternative career paths, such as teaching, politics, and working for non-governmental organizations. It is interesting to note for example, that the two pages in this questionnaire pertaining to legal practice have no corollary for non-practitioners who are teaching, in elective or appointive office, or involved in policy making jobs. I suspect that the readers of your final report would also be interested in how these people spend their time and whether they have experienced discrimination.

One of the best experiences of my life was at the Michigan Law School. Thanks for staying in touch with us.

At the time I was practicing law, I regretted the decision to attend law school. All I did was work. I had no personal life. Leaving the practice of law was the right decision for me, and one of the best decisions I've ever made. However, I no longer regret the time I spent practicing law, nor do I regret attending law school. The training in law school and practicing law has helped me tremendously in my current profession. Because of the time I spent as a lawyer, my writing skills (not reflected in this essay) are better than most of my peers. In my profession as a college professor, the ability to write is probably one of the most important skills to have.

In addition, my closest friends today are my law school classmates. So what started out (so I thought) as a bad career decision has given me many benefits both personally and professionally.

Knowing what I know now, I would make the same decision to attend law school. I

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could not have said this five years ago. However, I hope I never see the inside of another law firm.

Recently I began work at a new job specializing in international corporate tax planning, after having worked for the past 15 years on both domestic and international corporate tax issues. My new employer is a ... manufacturer with operations in the U.S., England, France and Japan. I'm looking forward to the fun of learning about a new company and of learning more about international tax issues.

I appreciate and value the way U. of M. Law taught me how to think – viewing the world from the perspective of an attorney is extremely helpful. But, I love to fly while using some of my legal skills as a union officer is the best of both worlds for me. I thoroughly enjoyed my 3 years at U. of M. Law, and would do it all over again. Believe it or not, I'd enjoy it more knowing I wasn't going to practice law afterwards. Law School followed by flight school or chef school would be fantastical.

After graduation I practiced for five years as in-house counsel to a manufacturing corporation. For the past ten years I have been a full-time, stay-at-home mother to two sons. I enjoyed my years of practice very much and I have also enjoyed my years spent raising children. Within the next twelve to eighteen months I expect to resume practice.

Although at times the practice of law is quite stressful and the balance between faculty life and professional life is [not readable], I have been on the whole very satisfied with my professional career. The variety and intellectual challenge of international work, the travel to exotic places, and the interplay of different cultures and legal systems. Michigan prepared me exceptionally well for my career and I often call on the members of the Michigan's extensive international legal community for assistance. While many lawyers complain about their professional lives and wish they had gone into some other profession. I am not one of them.

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I would like my law school experience to have included the study of the philosophy of law, especially natural law, general ethics, and logic.

I am disappointed that the law school is so deeply influenced by feminist and homosexual groups' ideology.

I had a great time in law school. Work in corporate law was not interesting, but when I moved to the county D.A.'s office law became fun again. Both Michigan Law School and my current job are rewarding and neither has caused me to make any significant sacrifices leading a full and exciting life.

At law school I was frustrated by the lack of opportunities to work on my legal drafting and legal articles once "case club" was over, given my failure in the entrance competition for journals. I think more emphasis should be placed on making such training/experiences available to all those who desire them, even when not in the top half of the class.

I have established my own law firm and have a transactional real estate and business practice representing individuals and small businesses. I am able to apply undergraduate business school, my legal skills, and the business skills I honed while in-house in a legal/business position with a real estate development company. My work directly impacts my non-institutional client base. I do a tremendous amount of counseling, with my legal work almost being secondary, i.e., it is the means rather than the ends.

Now that I have my own law firm, albeit a small one, my ability to balance my professional and personal goals have increased DRAMATICALLY, as has my income.

If I had a single piece of advice to offer young lawyers it would be to pursue an aspect of law in which you have a personal interest, pursue it with zeal, never let yourself be pigeon holed doing work you do not like or with lawyers or a law firm you do not like. And everything will eventually work out. I know too many lawyers who did not do that and 10-15 years out of school have found themselves financially locked into law firms/work they do not enjoy.

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U of M law school was superb education and challenge, Thanks.