Class of 1983 Five Year Report Alumni Comments

University of Michigan Law School

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I strongly believe that the non-practitioner emphasis at law school was much more valuable to me than practical training would have been. I believe this even though I am now a litigation attorney in private practice.

My major difficulty is balancing family and social life with work.

Although I enjoy practicing law, if it weren't for the money, I would likely be doing something else. Moreover, although I am glad I completed law school and became an attorney, I likely would not do it again.

To whom much is given, much is demanded. Let us all remember that the quality of life we experience in today's society is premised to a great extent on the law. As creators, users, interpreters and yes, manipulators of the law, it is imperative that we as lawyers are forever cognizant of the duties, responsibilities and obligations of the profession. This baggage demands that we do our best, not simply on each individual deal or transaction presently, but keeping in mind a future prospective as to what impact such transactions will have on the quality of life of successive generations.

History will reflect our decisions; the future demands that they be good ones.

Going out solo is tough but worth it. The ivory-tower isolation of downtown firms with Fortune 500 clients is crippling and deadening, and doesn't teach lawyers that critical survival/advancement skill: how to hustle clients.

I appreciate the training which was available to me at U of M more now than when I was attending school.

One regret is failure to become involved in extracurricular activities on a meaningful basis -- perhaps something can be done to encourage young students in this area. I would suggest placing greater emphasis on students exploring nontraditional avenues of employment, especially early in their careers.

Most of the people I work with (as well as most of the people I went to law school with) would really rather be doing something else. How can you live like that? The purpose of life is to allow the soul to be born; if the practice of law becomes an
impediment to that rather than an aid, then the practice of law should be abandoned. Money, prestige, security leave you sitting behind your desk only half alive: don't let that happen! Pursue life!

"Make voyages! Attempt them! There is nothing else."

Tennessee Williams

This questionnaire has caught me at a time of transition. After struggling for the past 6 months with the decision whether or not to quit my job, I have decided to resign from my job and spend the next three to six months traveling. I am not certain what type of job I will look for when I return -- it may be "law-related," but it will not be working for a large corporate law firm.

I do not like the demands the law firm puts on my life. For me to make partner three years from now, I would have to put forth 120% and devote my life to my job. I am unwilling to do that for a number of reasons. First, I do not like the type of work I do. My job involves a lot of drafting of long documents and I find that tedious and dry. Second, I like working with people and my job involves very little face-to-face contact with clients. I talk to clients over the phone, but I only meet them when a deal closes.

My firm is also placing increased importance on a person's ability to attract clients when deciding whether or not to make a person a partner. Most of my work is with the small town bankers in Georgia, and I think it is a very difficult client base for me to cultivate as a woman originally from the Midwest.

Another factor that has motivated me to leave my job is that I do not want to be in the same position five years from now that I am in now. I do not want to be like the women at my firm who are 4 to 6 years senior to me. These women spend most of their time at the firm and are not married. Being married and having a family are important to me and this job does not easily permit that.

On a more positive note -- I really enjoyed my 3 years at Michigan Law School. I met some wonderful friends with whom I still keep in close contact.

I feel I experienced discrimination because of my age when I was seeking work. I'd have appreciated recognition of this problem.

I have worked as a full time civil litigation law clerk for a fifteen lawyer law firm for the past year-and-one-half. I find that this position provides much of the same intellectual satisfaction of law practice while providing sufficient time for my personal and family life.
The legal culture, as introduced by the (U-M) Law School and as reinforced in the legal community, is in general very narrow intellectually and politically. Effort should be made in the Law School to create a truly heterogeneous environment, in order to actively encourage divergent views regarding the place and role of the lawyer in society. As it stands, the Law School takes a passive, "hands-off" approach. But this simply reinforced the traditional norms and environment already in place, which only serves to alienate those with truly critical intellects. If U-M Law School, and the U-M in general, truly wants to be a "leader," then it shouldn't constrain itself with having to adhere to the criteria traditionally espoused by so-called "leading" schools. One of the ways this is accomplished is by seeking to attract faculty with progressive political views, rather than stockpiling technocrats and apolitical legal theorists. To not actively promote true heterogeneity is not to remain politically neutral; clearly, a passive approach is political, for it reflects the norms of the given status quo, which, in this instance, are white, conservative, capitalist. This is not to say that the Law School should unilaterally seek to impose certain socioeconomic views/postures on its students w/the aim of trying to change them. It is to argue that latent potentialities within students should be given the opportunity to manifest themselves in the Law School. Such an approach, rather than imposing somebody's will on students, would in fact do away with the status quo that is currently imposed on them.* Get out of the last century!

*And nothing in such a scheme has to mean that the teaching of traditional legal skills has to suffer in the process. As it is now, the academic experience in law school is very narrow, with the second and third years highly repetitive.

Law practice is much more stressful and time consuming than I had ever anticipated. While I am currently a senior associate at a large law firm, I will not be staying much longer. I am looking for a position where I can devote more energy to my family and my community and less to my job. Large firm life is not life, it is existence. I don't know how others feel they can do it and still have time for anything else.

My best job to date was my judicial clerkship. Heaven on earth. But isn't it better to save the best for last?

After being a student for almost 20 years my most difficult adjustment to life as a lawyer was that I could not "start over" every few months. It took 3 or 4 years before I began to feel competent as a lawyer. Now that I have developed proficiency at this, I am ready to move on to a new challenge.

I think two things would have been useful to me in law school: 1) More guidance on what courses to take to get a well-rounded background, as well as guidance on what courses would be most useful in preparation for potential areas of practice; and 2) Since I've ended up in private practice serving business
clients (as I think a majority of U-M graduates probably do), and because I had no background whatsoever in business, I could have used more courses orienting me to the ways of the business world.

Currently, the most difficult aspect of being a lawyer for me is balancing having a family and fulfilling my obligations to them, and trying to work part-time, but still be taken seriously in the "legal culture" which seems to think work and family can't really mix. The firm I'm at is actually great because they're letting me work part-time, but I think there is still a pervasive sense that I can't really be taken seriously until I work full-time.

The firm I worked for after my 2nd year in law school -- raved over my work etc., promised to hire me if they needed anyone -- but instead hired an experienced attorney. That I wasn't going to work for them hurt me a great deal in 3rd year interviews. Consequently I was unable to secure employment until March 1984 -- with a very small firm. This situation did not work out, and to date I am unable to secure employment as an attorney. Despite having attended the great U-M Law School -- most reactions are -- "What a great background -- what happened?" Most reactions are if I went to U-M and am not an attorney, something is wrong -- and they don't even want to interview me. Needless to say -- if I can't get back into Law soon I shall regret my decision to attend law school -- especially since $17,500 of my $19,000 debt was incurred while in law school.

I have found the practice of law in a small firm setting to be very satisfying as it makes it possible for me to have a full family life. My husband and I "share" the "home work" related to 2 young children, but I find that the main burden of ensuring that the kids are clean, fed and at school on time falls on me. I must therefore limit my time as a practicing lawyer to 40 hours a week. I can do that fairly comfortably in my small, "low key" firm since I don't have the pressure to perform for the partners which exists in a large firm. (Of course I don't make half the income of large firm lawyers, but I'm willing to accept the lower pay for a more fulfilling home life.) The work I do in my practice is challenging and exciting, even tho I'm not practicing in a big city or big firm.

The duration of law school should be shortened to 2-2 1/2 years. This can best be accomplished by reducing the number of required class hours. Looking back on my law school experience, I think for most people the last semester (or perhaps last year) was a waste of time. Those that are involved in journals or clinic, etc., can stay the full 3 years.

1) Law school was a fantastic experience. Much of that had to do with the campus atmosphere and attitude of the faculty. I also attribute a lot of my happiness to my classmates. It was a nice mixture of bright, fun, interesting and normal. Dean Stillwagon does an extraordinary job.
2) Because many of us do not only practice law and go on to business related jobs, I believe there should be some business training. I am thinking of general management/financial/personnel kinds of instruction.

I think the questionnaires of non-practitioners should be analyzed/coded in a different group than that of the majority.

I am a librarian in a large law firm. For questions that demand comparison with others, I compare myself to the attorneys in my firm; but I doubt that Michigan J.D.'s in this sample include their firm's librarian in their compared group.

I wish there were some way to convince current law students that a job with a prestigious firm in a big city with a fantastic salary does not guarantee happiness. That was certainly the accepted goal while I was at U-M -- partially self-engendered, no doubt; yet so many of my law school friends have gone thru much agony, even to the point of dropping out of law altogether, when their expectations were dashed by the rude awakening of big-time law in the Real World.

I was extraordinarily disappointed with my law school experience. Even now, 5 years after graduating, it's painful to think about it.

The professors often seemed to try their best to make boring and obfuscate inherently interesting and elegant subject matter. They were clearly more concerned with publishing than with communicating with their students. The case books were overly long and unwieldy, taking 10 pages of small print to make a point that could have been made on 1; posing questions in minute type face that no one ever seemed to care about; and poorly organized. If one were unsophisticated and conscientious, one worked long hours attempting to master detail that, in the end, one really did not need to know. It was like a cruel joke.

Not having come from a family of lawyers, I was very naive about the practice of law, about law school, and about what was required to get a job. More competent counseling on these practical matters from the deans or others would have helped.

Law school was unpleasant, first to last, and completely needlessly. I have never run into an institution that so thoroughly and determinedly demoralizes those which it theoretically is trying to train and elevate.

The first year curriculum is a minimal introduction to the body of Anglo-American law through prolonged Socratic analysis of reported cases to illustrate various legal principles. Then come exams on the principles, not the cases. The Socratic method produces confusion, and is useful only to those with time and energy to waste. I believe that the use of confusion as an educational tool is vastly overrated.
After three years we are profoundly capable of obfuscating and diverting any principle of law which a judge will still routinely apply. This process does not make us more creative. The Socratic method is not much different in theory than a high school compare-and-contrast essay question. Whatever creativity we have we bring with us. On the other hand, we leave not knowing how to competently draft a simple legal agreement. We would be lost in a courtroom, and our clients with us. The only way to become competent is to serve as journeymen in a firm which can afford to teach us how to be lawyers, typically billing out our efforts at $100 an hour, which means few of us learn to serve any but the comparatively wealthy.

No contemporary of mine who graduated from law school could currently support the expense of a qualified lawyer in the average lawsuit. Certainly most other Americans cannot. There are no gradations of legal capability which could reduce expense. Typically State bars require graduation from a law school. Attempts to represent the public by any who are not such graduates are viewed askance by bar watchdog organizations. Thus, most of America remains wholly unrepresented or under-represented at a time when virtually every daily action is controlled by legal mechanisms.

As an employee, an American typically is bound by an employment contract, a labor union agreement, or a policy and procedures manual. If he is injured he must go before a Workmen's Compensation Board or a Social Security Board. If he has an accident in his car, his protection is determined by a lengthy and, typically, opaque insurance contract. If he dies, his plans for his children will depend upon the quality of his will. Nevertheless, most Americans are terrified in courtrooms and rightly so. They are not safe there, and they know it. They can't afford an attorney, and they know it. Thus, many of the people I run across live in a legal shadow-world, where what is legal or illegal is based more on rumor and superstition than fact. When confronted with demands by private or governmental institutions with the resources to hire an attorney, they tend to capitulate or disappear.

I am part of a legal system I did not create, and it breeds overlitigation, intimidation, and ignorance. I am part of the problem, and chagrined. Law schools have made law, as a body of learning, practically unavailable to the common man. Law schools, in an effort to insure quality, are only available to the most accomplished and the most privileged. The necessary corollary is that there are limited numbers of lawyers all of whom expect, if nothing else because of the resources which law school has required, to live a privileged lifestyle. Their assumptions about their abilities also necessarily lead to the conclusion that anyone who has not graduated from law school in an identical fashion has no business in a courtroom.
The result of this effort is dismal. First, I have seen a lot of lawyers who have graduated from a lot of accredited law schools and I can assure you neither professional nor ethical quality has been controlled. Second, society has cultivated ignorance (and confirmed our status) by relegating all legal training to the law schools and all evaluation of legal relationships to the legal profession. There is no effort in high school education to teach the average individual student anything about legal relationships whatsoever. We teach our children how to drive, but not what to do after an accident. There is no effort at the college level. We require successful completion of Rhetoric 101 but not an elementary course in Civil Procedure. The average citizen is much more likely to be in court than in a debating society.

The result is stupefying ignorance about "the law". Consider the Miranda decision. It is not an indication of how far a free society is willing to go to restrain the forces of law enforcement, but a confession that the police themselves must educate the average citizen about those restraints.

We would-be attorneys are not much better off. Various colleges, including the one I graduated from, make a pretence of having a "pre-law" curriculum which accept as worthwhile completion of courses in everything from French to biology. Nothing in my "pre-law" curriculum prepared me for law school. This educational disfunction defies rational explanation. It places an impossible burden on the law school. A law student is supposed to learn everything that there is to know to become a competent lawyer in, theoretically, virtually any field of law and pass the bar exam (with a little help from a bar review course), in three short years. This is at best, wishful thinking and at worst, folly. When we leave most of us have never seen the inside of a courtroom or drafted a single document of any significance.

Law school should have a much greater emphasis on clinical ability, research and drafting. Law school should be expanded to at least a five year curriculum and college, which is little more than a continuation of refresher courses from high school for most of us, should be shortened accordingly. With some of the pressure off, perhaps students could find time to work in school, and defray the huge debt which confronts them upon graduation. Alternatively, there should be graduated levels of expertise so that the individual law students can specialize; become qualified as being competent to handle legal tasks of varying sophistication, and at reduced cost.

We lawyers have created, in our secularism, a society organized and sanctified by the rule of law. We have made the rule of law, in our efforts to protect all levels of society, applicable to all levels of society. However, we have not made available to all levels of society the instruments necessary to give that protection value. We always say, as a group, that the courts are supposed to be the citizen's last refuge, where he is free from
the oppression of a legislature or an executive run amok. They aren't. The admission price is too damned high.

I don't believe confidential criticism is appropriate. Recipients of criticism should be able to consider its source.

Signed: Shawn J. Holliday

I do not practice law so my answers to the survey may not be very helpful.

Unfortunately, I found legal training at Michigan extraordinarily narrow. While students were sharp, their intellectual horizons were limited. Unfortunately, the faculty and the curriculum did little to change that. I found little awareness and interest in Critical Legal Studies and Law and Economics, the two liveliest parts of modern legal thinking. Students were not encouraged to engage themselves in the intellectual currents that make Michigan a great university. Law students should be taught some graduate level social science and some philosophy. They need to be stretched intellectually and challenged to reflect critically on law and the legal profession. Otherwise, all the law school produces is technicians. Michigan should be more than a trade school; it wasn't when I attended.

My nonparticipation in activities in law school was primarily due to my being rejected by the Law Journal. I think the Law School would benefit from having a broader range of journals, such as schools like Columbia or New York University have, for those people like me who like to write and do research and are less enthused by other, more hands-on law school activities such as practice clinics.

My current nonparticipation in charitable activities is attributable to the fact that I am still attending classes at night part-time, in order to get an L.L.M. in tax at New York University.

Law school did a pretty good job of preparing me for my job. However, after the first year, I found it to not be intellectually stimulating. I think as a law student you are forced to do so much you don't have an opportunity to really think about or get excited.

The faculty and student body should stop being so apologetic about the fact that so many students take jobs at big firms. It can be good, stimulating work. If students feel "forced" to interview with big firms and regret it, they weren't realistic about the practice of law or had too idealistic notions.

1) I feel that most attorneys are far less happy with their jobs than I am with mine. The opportunity to deal with social issues and policy issues makes my job far more creative than the jobs many of my friends have.
2) Law school was a painful experience for me. It was the first time in my life that I ever really did poorly in an academic regime (my final standing was well into the second half of the class). This terrified me and made me question both my intelligence and my prospects as a lawyer. In many ways one's value as an individual is directly tied to one's academic success in law school. I resented doing poorly on tests and attempted to compensate by proving myself to be a strong writer and a class leader. As far as employers and friends were concerned, I succeeded very well; as far as my self-image was concerned I am still scrambling to prove to myself that those low test scores are not the only reliable indicia of my intelligence. Five years later, after a prestigious clerkship, a coveted stint in public service, and laudatory evaluations from superiors in my law firm, I still feel as though my law school transcript, like the scarlet letter, will always remain with me as a badge of humiliation.

3) It is impossible to overestimate the effect an outstanding teacher can have on a student. To me, Bill Bishop and David Chambers will remain prototypical examples of both fine lecturers and exemplary human beings.

4) The Law School's selection process, which encourages diversity in the student body, is to be highly commended. It is easy to fill a class with bright students; it is much harder to fill a class with bright and interesting students.

5) The concept of "thinking like a lawyer" is bogus. A more meaningful phrase is "critical (or analytical) thinking." Law school is not necessarily related to any of these; law practice, however, requires one to think critically.

The Law School accepted minority students under an unspoken affirmative action plan. Yet, the Law School never had the guts to openly support the concept of affirmative action before the Law School student body. As a consequence, minority students were left to fight the stigma of being less qualified or unqualified. Not only did the Law School fail to openly support its own affirmative action policies, but it also added to the stereotype that minority students were less qualified or unqualified. For example, I can remember a 1983 R.G. article in which Dean Sandalow stated that most of the "bottom 15" academic students were minorities. I can't begin to describe the additional pressure such an ill thought out statement placed on me as a 1st year student. Dean Sandalow made this outrageously insensitive remark to the student press in spite of the Law School's position that it would not rank students until after graduation (Apparently, the Law School administration was sensitive enough to realize that undue emphasis is placed on ranking and that ranking is more destructive to the students' psyches than it is useful as an informational tool.).

I look back at law school as a bittersweet admixture of pain & gain -- of intellectual stimulation and friendly banter weighed against a teaching system seemingly designed to sap one's self-esteem or sense of triumph. Only for the lucky few on Law Review or Coif was a consistent sense of achievement allowed by the high
priests of academe. Unable to break the code of the high A/A+ student, I think the remainder of students in most classes were left with a sense of failure, even though they had achieved so much to be there, even though the bottom of a Michigan Law class could out-think and out-perform most other law students in the country.

It is sometimes said that the revenge of the "average" law student is to see his/her salary rise to triple the level of the Law Review Editor-in-Chief cum professor-in-waiting. The real world of law does seem to most highly reward that "merely" common-sensical practitioner with the "B" average who really understands -- and enjoys -- the social milieu in which he/she practices. I may be in the minority, but I think society may have that right. This is not the ramblings of a disgruntled "C" student -- I had an A- average and graduated cum laude. But on only the rarest occasions did I feel I was thinking anything of value, at least in class (I was active on Journal and there achieved that sense of accomplishment classrooms wouldn't provide). When this same inability to selflessly praise is found in most large private law firms, one can leave school and wander as if in the desert searching for the good in practice.

I recently left this vacuous private setting to work for the U.S. Attorney's Office in my state. I find a joy among my bosses and peers alike in the small achievement of practice -- the settlement effected, the trial won. Not everyone can be great (excessive egalitarianism is no answer). But everyone can be respected, and praised in their own world.

I know that I too gladly accepted the judgment (grades) of professors I sometimes did not even like or respect. I have great confidence in the practice of criminal law (A) and water law (A) but don't know if I'll ever feel fully competent to opine on matters of civil procedure (B-), though I now practice it daily. I think I was too young, too inexperienced in real life to carry the all-important ego center we each need which allows us to absorb the criticisms of others without feeling a piece of ourselves is forever lost.

I might suggest taking older students, students with more years of "real life." But don't get me wrong. I'd do it again and wouldn't go anywhere but U-M (what I know of other schools is much worse). So keep up the good work. But listen more carefully for those silent sufferers of law school.

Law school curriculum could stand a huge injection of history, and not "legal" history. Negotiation has not been practiced best by lawyers, but by statesmen. Logic and skill in conveying ideas are hardly preserves of lawyers, and good writing has hardly any connection to law school at all.

It seems that law school's substantive design is organized around a convenient system for making tenure decisions, with only
passing concern for the development of the law student's mind. This will not injure us in the pocketbooks. It does and will continue to diminish the quality of our minds.

I loved law school -- it was hard but challenging -- the people were some of the closest friends I have made. What is alarming is the consistent theme of all our contacts over the past five years -- with very few exceptions -- all of us either very strongly dislike or are discouraged with the realities of practice. We all went to big firms in big cities -- most had clerked for those firms -- we were excited and thrilled to have the $ and prestige and be real lawyers. But all we talk about is how much we dislike our jobs -- and what, if anything, we could do for even 2/3 the income that would be somehow more rewarding or provide some sense of real accomplishment. The stress to bill and compete is unreal, and so many, especially the women, have decided it's just not worth it. Everyone wants a corporate "in-house" job -- they're supposed to have "normal" (or more? normal) hours -- but no one wants to give up the shot at the brass ring -- partnership. Slowly, we are anyway -- because, as the $ climb, the hours quotas climb, and the quality of life at 2300 billable hours/year or more is 0, no matter how much $ you make.

Life is infinitely better than law school. While I think Michigan is certainly one of the finest law schools in the country, law school is a degrading, unpleasant experience. I don't know anyone who can honestly say that he or she enjoyed law school. Given my feelings about law school, I am particularly pleased to report that I enjoy practicing law. Practicing law involves a certain amount of drudgery, but then, what doesn't?

You didn't ask -- and perhaps aren't interested in -- what problems face the legal profession. I think solo practitioners are the greatest threat to the profession. People don't learn to be lawyers in law school, and someone who graduates from law school (particularly a second-(or lower) tier school) and puts up a shingle is a hazard to those who assume that such a person is competent to render legal services. Aside from exhibiting overall incompetence, solo and small-time practitioners are, in my experience, the least ethical of lawyers.

More time needs to be spent in law school learning about actual practice (e.g., clinical law). Less stress should be put on high paying private practice.

I feel that law school would better serve its students if it put more emphasis on writing (including drafting of other than litigation documents) and negotiating since that's what lawyers mostly do.

Perhaps the most troubling feature of big firm practice is its combination of technical fluency and moral illiteracy. Very bright people are so avid to represent clients that they rarely question the value of their own work or their clients'. (This
does not imply any insensitivity to canons of ethics, which are really part of the technical fluency, but instead a myopic approach to the broader import of our day to day work.) Law schools can provide some useful perspective, and Michigan may be the best at presenting an integrated, humanistic approach to law. But college and much sooner is really the time to learn it.

Women at my law firm are very much discriminated against--although by not all the lawyers but by the lawyers in charge or with power. However, the discrimination is very subtle. Women are given less challenging, backwater work. Or ignored, overlooked, not helped along at all! So when it comes time for promotions, raises, partnership, etc. then the women really are not as well qualified!

I commute 2 1/2 hours a day (total). That means a 12 1/2 hour or so workday, every day, plus taking work home. I need to be home with my family more. I spend many hours a week worrying about this! I also try to cram as much into the workday as possible to avoid any "wasted" time at work.

Our law firm is currently wrestling with this issue--how to be the best lawyers we can and provide the best services to our clients, and still be the best family members we can.

I am lucky enough to work with fine, honest, and highly intelligent lawyers...but I still may leave the profession some day. One thing I hate is the feeling that while I do a good job, and represent a city and a water authority which are "good guys," the comments I hear about the profession from other people are frequently so negative.

Don't let the Law School sacrifice theory to nuts and bolts--but if you do increase "nuts and bolts," always tie "the greater good" to it.

Wishes: 1) I wish I'd taken Legal History. 2) I think you should emphasize file management and discovery management. There's a need--and graduates have no idea how to organize such things!

Overall an extremely positive experience. One complaint I have is that although I sought financial aid none was available for me when I was in school, now the requests for my helping others from the School never seem to end.

If the School can be responsive, or at least civil, when a student is attending, its success in seeking the student's help for others might be greater.

I believe there has been a marked decline in the profession due to (i) too many lawyers, and (ii) the explosion of litigation. I base this on conversations with older attorneys and the experiences with my firm.
On the other hand, legal training has taught me a great deal
about problem-solving and, should I leave practice, I will have
been well-served by it.

The longer I practice, the more I appreciate the three years I
spent at the Law School.

In all candor, the "training" I received was not particularly
useful -- I feel as if, after five years of practice, I am
finally completing a somewhat lengthy apprenticeship in how to be
a lawyer.

In contrast, the Law School gave me a broad view of the
profession; in fact, given the central role of law in western
civilization, it was a three-year course of study that really
completed the liberal arts background I began in college.

Perhaps this is a minority view -- admittedly, I probably took
more "liberal arts" courses in law school -- in history,
economics and comparative law -- than the average student; I
certainly avoided any excess of narrower "practical" courses.

In any event, as law becomes more and more a business rather than
a profession, I cherish the courses -- and the professors -- that
gave me a different, and better, view of the lawyer's role than
as a hired gun available to the highest bidder. And all of this
is a long way of saying, very simply, keep up the good work.

Two things strike me in thinking about the effect that Michigan
Law School has had on my life. First, I thank my lucky stars
every day that I got in -- the ease with which I got a job and
have changed jobs since is due in no small part to having
Michigan on my resume. It really means something.

Second, as much as we griped and groaned about how much time we
all spent studying, looking back, I find that I made some of my
closest friendships during law school. I miss the constant
intellectual stimulation that I found outside the classroom as
well as inside.

Although I do no tax work, tax was perhaps my most valuable class
because the late L. Hart Wright taught students how to really
analyze legal problems. His lessons remain a valuable part of my
training.

I appreciate the broad education I received at U of M more all
the time.

I had fun in law school. In comparing my law school experiences
to those of my friends, I have come to realize that students at
Michigan L.S., or at least my friends and acquaintances in the
Class of '83, were somewhat unique. Going to law school did not
mean you couldn't have fun and enjoy life. Other law schools
seem to have more of those gutless, hollow people for whom
studying law, and probably the rest of their lives, will be nothing more than a grim business taken far too seriously. There seemed to be a large group of fairly normal folks in my class, and to them I say thanks and best wishes. You know who you are.

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Even in blissful hindsight, law school was a pain in the neck. While the law school environment to some extent fostered intensive intellectual effort, it concomitantly helped stunt the emotional and social growth of a significant percentage of its students. Many of those who entered law school as reasonably secure adults later graduated from law school with their priorities distorted in favor of the material and their self-concepts sorely shaken. Those who came initially with self-doubts or poor social aptitudes generally suffered an exacerbation of these problems.

While it may well not be the role of the Law School to open the eyes and hearts of its pupils to the vast and diverse social and political world around them, focusing instead on abstract questions of legal principle, it clearly constituted a shortcoming that in three years of legal study, the learning environment fostered among us a greater looking-inward, an increased emphasis on concern for oneself, rather than nurturing an attitude of expanded openness toward the needful world, toward a planet populated by people suffering from hunger, homelessness and disease.

We were, unfortunately, overwhelmed by the need to acquire the best canned outlines, and to collect interviews with and job offers from prestigious law firms. There was little possibility, in the circumstances, that many of us would retain the energy, wherewithal or presence of mind or priorities to focus our above-average education and skills on tasks which might benefit society.

One hopes, in the aftermath of our mad, collective rush for prestige and the big buck, that some of us have since grown up, maybe gotten a little more humble, and, perhaps, come home to the sensible, caring concerns which once guided us toward a law school education.

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But for the extreme frustration I felt while practicing insurance defense law at a 100+ firm, I would not have had the courage to "give it all up" to pursue an uncertain career as a commercial pilot. Fortunately, 3 years later, the gamble has paid off; I am flying commercially while practicing law part-time at a smaller firm. I couldn't be happier.

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I think the adversary system is a farce. Trials aren't two sides trying to present the truth, but rather often the expenditure of substantial amounts of time, money and effort to distort and hide the truth, or to make matters so confusing a jury can't figure out what is the truth. I would expect my next job to be nonlaw.

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As Professor St. Antoine used to say, if we could hit the curve ball or the high notes, we probably wouldn't have been in school then and probably wouldn't be lawyers now. Overlooking those alternatives (as I must), I was relatively happy in school and still am. And, occasionally, I feel like I am stepping up to bat in a critical situation.

In the course of my poverty law practice, I have developed several ironic maxims to describe our legal system and profession.

"In the United States, we have the best civil rights and due process that money can buy."

"The most important factor in child custody is the highest bidder."

"If you are about to be assaulted by a stranger, call the police -- they regard prevention of violence as a high priority, and they hate to see innocent people get hurt. If you are a woman battered by your husband, you first need to get a judge to tell the cop that you are an innocent victim before the cop will prevent the violence."

"'Pro bono,' for most lawyers, means work done for paying clients who didn't."


"Best argument I have heard against clinical program expansion at UM Law School: 'Most of our students will never see the inside of a courtroom.'" [Doug Kahn said that.]

"Why I don't contribute to the Law School Fund: See paragraph immediately above."

If you are compiling such statistics -- I married a member of my class ('83) at Michigan.

I believe that were it not for my attendance at the Law School, I would not currently hold my current position or station in life. As I am satisfied with that position, I thank the Law School and am indebted to it.

Although I enjoyed law school, it does not adequately prepare its graduates for the work place. As students, we waste 75% on subjects which neither interest us nor which will be of assistance in our careers. The faculty places undue reliance on esoteric discussions on obscure subjects -- a dose of pragmatism is desperately needed. This problem may be lessened if more of the faculty had greater legal experience before joining their academic posts.

Despite the fact that I too enjoy my present career as a litigator (in personal injury defense litigation) most of my fifth year associate friends from U of M have either changed jobs or are expressly unhappy with their positions. Most are involved with a business oriented practice at high power, big name firms. Unfortunately, their daily function as a lawyer is
mundane and demeaning (even if they do receive a big pay check). I fortuitously have been involved with a more exciting litigation practice, primarily because I chose a less mainstream approach, i.e., insurance defense vs. business litigation or corporate work.

In retrospect, it becomes apparent that law school failed miserably in assisting its students in their quest for the best type of practice which will suit them. Just because a student likes his professor or course material in anti-trust, criminal procedure, etc., does not mean they will be happy in that specialty of law. Instead, learning what the daily routine of an anti-trust or criminal lawyer is much more meaningful information. The student should be advised that some jobs are more office-oriented and involve considerable research, document review, brief or memo writing, etc. while others involve a great deal of outside work such as depositions, trials, negotiation sessions, etc.

A mandatory seminar should be provided which offers the above information to second year students. Visiting attorneys could describe what their particular practice involves on a daily level. The students should then be provided a hands-on experience with many of those activities -- example: watching a deposition, drafting documents arguing a motion, attending a negotiation session, etc.

The above may assist U of M's grads so that they may select the right job as their 1st one.

Within a year after joining a large law firm, I realized that I would not be able to raise a family while working in that setting -- especially since my husband (another U of M Law grad) also worked long hours for a large firm. Before my first child was born I informed the firm that I would not be returning. Frankly, I think the firm was relieved that they did not have to deal with a woman returning from maternity leave, and I negotiated an excellent severance package that enabled me to finish several projects after my son's birth. The firm does not have a good track record regarding women with families: no woman with children has made partner, and two senior associates who took maternity leave were turned down for partnership less than two years later.

I investigated part-time job opportunities, but none seemed to offer enough stimulation or pay. With my husband's encouragement, I decided to start my own practice doing business and estate planning. Since I would rather be with my children than sit through a motion call, I refer out all litigation. It has been easier to get clients than I thought it would be. I try to be away from the children no more than five hours at a time, and I work a lot of late nights after the children are asleep. I love working with clients and I love the flexibility of working five to twenty-five hours per week. Our children are 3 years
old, eighteen months old, and we are expecting our third child in November. I hope to keep my present work schedule at least until all our children are in school.

I regret that I didn't study harder in law school or take a greater variety of courses outside of my specialty. I also wish I had enjoyed law school and the relationships with other students more. It was a real hiatus to life which should have been a more positive experience. Perhaps the rigorous academic demands of 1st year law school set the negative tone for the entire three years for me.

On the other hand, the practice of law is a delightfully fulfilling experience which I am thoroughly enjoying. It is interesting and challenging. Of course, it also offers a comfortable lifestyle and a certain status in life which I find rewarding.

There should be more attention paid to the individual student during the first year. The School needs to be more realistic about the extensive debt often involved and make career planning part of the regular curriculum. The Socratic method should be reserved for the 2nd and 3rd years. The first year, basic courses should be taught in a straightforward, lecture manner, so that at least the fundamental courses are comprehended by all students. The School should also do what it can to minimize pressure on students during the school year to interview for summer jobs. Perhaps interviewing could be limited to a 2-week period. Finally, writing and advocacy should be taught either during the summer before the first year, or as a year-long course, taught by regularly employed instructors. Third-year students should not teach writing and advocacy.

Picking a small firm was an extraordinarily good choice.

You should have asked about legal publications.

The biggest single form of discrimination in the law is by age -- at age 30, I attract clients through articles, phone calls, correspondence and referrals; almost never from people who know how old I am before they contact me.

If you've gotta ask, you'll never know.

1. The Law School did absolutely nothing to help me financially while I was a student. Its insensitivity and arrogance ("If you can't afford it you shouldn't have come here" -- Sandy Bertram) has left me ill-disposed to contribute as an alumnus.
2. Fortunately, being a lawyer is much more satisfying and enjoyable than being a law student.

If I had it to do all over again I would not go to law school.

In retrospect, I should have taken a year off before going into
law school. I was too immature at 21 and did not have a stable concept of my personal identity and definition of self.

The Law School should do a better job of soliciting input from students on matters directly affecting them, particularly in the areas of faculty hiring and tenure decisions, and curriculum. The Law School should also place a greater emphasis on teaching ability in making faculty hiring and tenure decisions.

1. Life after law school can be very hard for those in the bottom half of the class. Grades are so important to employers.
2. There are a lot of very humiliating jobs offered to (and accepted by) attorneys, e.g., jobs paying less than $20,000, with no redeeming public interest value. There is quite a bit of competition for those menial jobs.
3. U of M Law is the best!

The time/money tension: to generate enough income to give family and self the things that I value takes a great deal of time, so much time that personal and family time suffers. Is there a solution to this tension in the private practice of law? Not that I can discover at this point. The answer for one who earns income at an hourly rate (or does "piece work" as they call it in the trades) is either to: (i) lower income requirements, or (ii) leave private practice.

Law school sucked. Too many lawyers are idiots and/or jerks.

U of M Law School and its students are highly respected both within my firm and the legal community. Although I have worked very hard towards a successful career as a lawyer, a very large measure of my success is due to U of M.

I enjoyed my time in Ann Arbor, including Law School (usually), very much. I enjoy practicing law a great deal, but wish that there was more time to always do the best work I am capable of and to do more to educate myself, serve the bar and the community at large. I am fortunate to have the support of my family in my endeavors.

Generally, I consider my Michigan Law School education one of my greatest assets as an attorney.

Biggest criticism of law school is lack of practical skill training, especially drafting contracts and business organization documents.

As an English graduate student, I miss the lawyer's salary I once earned. I don't miss it enough, however, to return to corporate legal work. I like visiting my friends who are attorneys. In my experience, the nicest offices are in San Francisco. I will be in the Peace Corps when you read this.