All in the Family: Alumni and Student Connections at the Law School

By Ann Fruland

Each year at orientation, the Law School hosts a panel for the spouses of the new Law School students. And each year, the panelists try to explain what it is like to attend the Law School: the rigors and demands of coursework, the thrill of learning from extraordinary faculty, and the extreme sense of accomplishment upon graduation. Without fail, someone on the panel comments, “You really only understand it if you’ve gone through it yourself.”

At any given time, a few of our students are lucky enough to have someone in their family who already understands. Of the more than 11,000 living alumni, approximately 11 percent have a relative who also has a UChicago Law degree, including grandparents, parents, aunts, uncles, siblings, and cousins, bringing this tight-knit community a little closer to home.

In the classes of 2016, 2017, and 2018, sitting in our classrooms right now, 20 students have an alum (or four!) in their family. These stories shed a little light, and a few anecdotal memories, on the unique bond that exists between those students and the Law School alumni on their family tree.
My degree opened doors for me at the start of my career, and then kept those doors open even after taking a break for raising a family. Being a graduate of UChicago Law School gave me a level of credibility in the profession that allowed me to pursue my personal goals, while still being able to practice law along a very nontraditional path.

Sandra’s Memory Lane

One of my best memories is of my two best friends and me studying together for finals. We would sit at the table with a bowl of Jelly Bellies (for study breaks) and then end the evening of studying with a game of hearts. I kept in touch with these girlfriends, who both stood up at my wedding, and while one of them sadly passed away, I am still in touch with the other one.

Daniel: Being able to talk to my mom about her time here certainly helped me understand the school better and made it a focus of my applications, though given that it is a top school, I wanted to attend anyway! This is a fascinating community where people with all different backgrounds, interests, and areas of study can share their views and ideas while pursuing the same goals. The University fosters this open community and has been very valuable, in my opinion.

It has been special for us to be able to compare our experiences, which gives us the unparalleled ability to see how the Law School has changed (or stayed the same).

Alex Gross, ’16, and his grandfather, Leslie A. Gross, ’49

Alex: The fact that my grandfather went to the University of Chicago was what made me really consider leaving the west and made this one of my top choices before I even began the application process. However, it was the school that sold itself. The small size and access to professors, combined with the academic rigor, drew me more than the fact that my grandfather attended. Aside from being a great place to launch my career, the Law School feels that much more special because it is the institution that my grandfather attended. It feels nice to go to a school that carries such a reputation while at the same time having a familial connection.

I never knew my grandfather, and from what I understand we have somewhat different personalities. Attending this school makes me feel connected to him in a way that I never had the chance to—not only that we have something in common (aside from our love of cars), but also our drive for education, profession, and our soon-to-be alma mater.
DAVID A. BRONNER, ’73, PARTNER AT NIXON PEABODY, AND HIS DAUGHTER, SAMANTHA BRONNER, ’18. (DAVID’S SON AND SAMANTHA’S BROTHER, BENJAMIN, IS ALSO A STUDENT THE UNIVERSITY, STUDYING AT THE BOOTH SCHOOL OF BUSINESS.)

David: Good stories always start with a girl! I had a girlfriend whose sister was dating a law professor at NYU. He said, if he had the choice again, he would go to Chicago. The classes are small and the faculty is outstanding.

Samantha decided to go to law school, and Chicago was her first choice. Given my background and affiliation, it was a major factor in her decision.

She asked me to read her application essays and give my feedback. Lo and behold, she said she wanted to be a mergers and acquisitions lawyer, like me. I was blown away!

Since then, I’ve been sharing with Samantha what the life of an M&A lawyer is versus that of a litigator, and what I’ve gained over the years. We talk about her professors, assignments, cases, and she bounces things off me.

I’m reliving my Law School days from a different vantage point. Having practiced all these years, I’m enjoying the experiences she’s sharing with me, and I’m getting a lot out of her experiences by just learning what she’s going through.

We’re a Chicago family through and through.

David’s Memory Lane
I drove out from New York and arrived in the bursar’s office a few days before class. I was in line to have dinner at the dorm. I asked the guy behind me if he was a 1L too. He said yes, so we decided to eat together.

We sat down and he proceeded to tell me that he went to Swarthmore, had just published his third book on economics, and he was coaching the debate team for the University. Those were just some of his accomplishments.

That night, I called my parents and said, “If they’re all like him, I’m in big trouble!” It turned out to be Frank Easterbrook, ’73, a giant in the judicial world. Frank was appointed circuit judge in the US Court of Appeals for the Seventh District, the youngest federal appellate judge since 1892, and became its chief judge in 2006.

Samantha: Growing up, I loved hearing my father’s stories from his time at the Law School. I feel grateful that I now have a chance to follow in his footsteps, both in attending the Law School and in pursuing transactional law. Each day at the Law School has brought forth countless academic and professional opportunities. I am glad that I get to share my experiences here with my father and count on him as a source of support.
Laura Fox, ’87, Whose Career Included Time at Disney and DreamWorks, and Her Nephew, Andrew Parker, ’17. Laura’s Father, Jacob L. Fox, AB ’42, JD ’47, and Grandfather, Jacob Logan Fox, 1913, Also Attended the Law School.

Laura: Andrew and I have many shared experiences, in general and also at the Law School. He actually lived in the same off-campus apartment as I did while at the Law School, we both attended the University of Michigan for our undergraduate degrees, and he will be clerking at the same firm that I did. We also both had Professor Baird. He’s having a fantastic experience. As I see Andrew developing, I know that the very nature of the institution, intellectual without being pretentious, is going to be a critical aspect of his career too. It’s unique in so many ways, and it felt like home.

Andrew: My aunt Laura has been a great mentor in this capacity—she also transitioned from law to business during her career. Today she wears many hats in philanthropy. I’ve had many conversations with Laura about success in law, business, and having fun along the way.

Laura and I both had the pleasure of having Professor Baird for a 1L class. I had the unique pleasure of being the first student cold-called on the first day of his class. After a less than articulate answer, Professor Baird proclaimed it “spirited, but wrong.” Both Laura and I consider Professor Baird among our favorite professors, and he still remembers her.

We like to talk about obscure cases from 1803 during Thanksgiving! Just kidding, we rarely do that. But it has been great to have someone to talk to about the trials and fun of law school. It’s incredible that not only did we have some of the same professors, but also to mention her name and they still remember her.

Ann K. Adams, ’93, Associate Vice President for Research at Northwestern University, and Her Cousin, Laura Casselberry, ’17

Ann: I was on campus this winter for a week-long leadership program. I met up briefly with Laura, but she had to go soon thereafter. She was having lunch with Randy Picker, and I thought, I never had lunch with any professors!

When Laura decided that she was going to apply to the Law School (the only school she applied to), she asked me to review her essay and I remember thinking how fabulous it would be to have her go and how lucky they’d be to have her. It made me feel so proud, and I’d like to say I influenced her a little!

Right before Laura was interviewing for 1L summer internships, we were having a conversation about what she was hoping to do after law school. Having come from Teach for America, she has a strong sense of social justice and equality, so it’s nice that, now more than ever, the path from a top-tier law school doesn’t necessarily have to lead to a top-tier law firm. The Law School offers students like Laura the opportunity to have the courage to veer from the traditional path.

Ann’s Memory Lane

The faculty member who was most impactful to me was Elena Kagan. I say that because I’ve now taught some classes, not that I compare myself to her by any means. That was her first year teaching and I remember her telling us how many hours she took to prepare for each course. My key takeaway, which I still use: don’t walk in to any situation unprepared, which is a really great lesson.

Watching her career from afar, when she became a Supreme Court justice, I wrote her a congratulations note and she wrote back, crossing out “Ms. Adams” and writing “Ann.” I give her credit for having taught me that humility and genuineness in relationships, and how you act in the workforce, is ultimately so much more important than some of the trivial things people get hung up on.
Robert Hugi, ’86, Retired, Special Counsel at Mayer Brown LLP, and His Daughter, Alli Hugi, ’18

Robert: The biggest difference so far between our Law School experiences is that Alli is living in Hyde Park, whereas I lived on the north side and commuted down. I got married the summer before I started at the school, and the north side was more convenient for my wife. As a commuter and a slow friend-maker anyway, I really had minimal contact with my classmates, outside of class time and a couple of short-lived study groups first year. My main Law School buddy was also married and living on the north side. We carpooled.

Single and living in Hyde Park, Alli is much more a part of the Law School community than I was. Since Alli decided to attend the Law School, I have thought back about my years there more than I had done for quite a while. Those were some pretty good years, both in terms of the educational experience and what else was going on my life. Looking back has been fun.

Robert’s Memory Lane

In Civil Procedure with Richard Posner we read a case about a Supreme Court decision on a constitutional (I think) challenge to one of the rules of federal civil procedure. Posner asked why the Court had decided to accept the case, since the Court itself had approved the rules not long before the case was brought, and presumably had considered the legality of the rules in the approval process. He made us guess for at least two whole sessions and was never satisfied with any of our answers, nor did he ultimately give us one of his own. We moved on, and I remember worrying that the question would come back on the final exam. It didn’t. That was probably the most Paper Chase–like experience I had at the Law School.

In my third year I worked part time for Mayer Brown. Winter quarter I had Federal Securities Law with Easterbrook, which was my only afternoon class. To spend more time on the job, I skipped all but a few of the class sessions. I studied like mad for the final but was so nervous about how I might have done that I took an extra class in the spring so that I would have enough credits even if I flunked Federal Securities Law. Easterbrook was the last to post grades of any of my winter classes. I passed (with flying colors, actually) and gratefully dropped the extra class.

Alli: Based on friends at other law schools, there is definitely a unique Chicago-style way of teaching the law, which I have been impressed by so far and which I think shows us an interesting, distinctive way of approaching the law, which is fun to share with my dad. I like being able to talk about professors or readings or events and have my dad be able to strongly relate; similarly, I enjoy being able to picture his Law School days and to frame his stories based on my now firsthand experience.

My dad’s postfinals routine was listening to John Coltrane and smoking a cigar—I hope to be cool enough to do the same one of these quarters.
Sigrid Jernudd, ’12, an Associate at Hughes, Hubbard & Reed, LLP, and her nephew, Sten Jernudd, ’17

Sigrid: One of the reasons I enjoy hearing about Sten’s time at the Law School is that we have had quite different experiences so far! However, the Law School is small enough that we have had a lot of the same professors, and it is very interesting to hear his perspective—especially when we disagree!

When he started in 2014, I had only been out of law school for two years, and I feel much more connected to the school being able to get updates on what has (and hasn’t!) changed, and the staff and faculty. It definitely makes me feel more connected to the Law School. I was also able to feel like more use was being made of three years of outlines!

Sigrid’s Memory Lane
The Law School musical was consistently one of my favorite law school experiences. I played Martha Nussbaum for three years running, in a series of outrageous dresses and a short blonde wig. I wish I still had that wig!

Also, I studied in the same chair in the library for most of my law school career. I would like to see if anybody else has claimed that spot! It was a good one!

STUDENT/ALUMNI CONNECTIONS BY CLASS:

CLASS OF 2016: EIGHT
CLASS OF 2017: FIVE
CLASS OF 2018: SEVEN
Jake: Having my eyes set on other schools originally, David thought that my personality was a better fit for the kind of academic rigor and economic/analytic approach to the law that University of Chicago espouses. He also knew that with my desire to live in the Midwest after law school, perhaps no other school carried as much significance and prestige as the University of Chicago. His excitement for the school made me equally excited when I received my acceptance.

There is always something to obsess a bit about during these three (or four if you count the admissions process) years. David has always kept things in perspective. Before I received an acceptance, he was kind enough to let me know that if I didn’t get in, there would be other options (though he never did say equally valuable ones). When I had no idea what expectation damages were and thought that maybe this was all a mistake, David was the one who told me that this sentiment is not unique. As OCI approached, David gave both support and real advice about firms, questioning what I really wanted to do, and encouraged me to not choose a firm based on its name alone. David has provided a “this too shall pass” view that is immensely valuable to any student who gets caught up in the newest, ultimately transient, apocalypse.

David: Jake and I have both had the pleasure and challenge—36 years apart—to have Richard Epstein for a first-year class. I’m so delighted Jake came to Chicago. He’s going to be a great lawyer because he’s got the kind of raw material that Chicago is best at molding.

Understanding the law and being able to talk to lawyers has been an essential aspect of every job I’ve had. The UChicago Law degree gave me credibility in the Congress, in the European Union, and in corporate boardrooms.

David’s Memory Lane
I’m the famous (infamous) student who spent his third year working in Washington, DC, for the Consumer Federation of America when I was supposed to be in class. I was almost expelled, but the way that Dean Casper dealt with the issue was incredibly fair and just. I was ordered to be in class every day for the spring quarter and was called on nearly every day. I learned a lot that quarter—about the law and life. I also got the only two 80+ grades in my Law School career.

Jake Greenberg, ’17
David Greenberg, ’81

DO YOU HAVE A FAMILY CONNECTION WITH A UCHICAGO LAW STUDENT? WE WOULD LOVE TO HEAR FROM YOU! SEND YOUR STORY TO ANN FRULAND, ASSISTANT DIRECTOR OF DEVELOPMENT COMMUNICATIONS, AT AFRULAND@UCHICAGO.EDU.

Braden: I am very close to my brother, Kimball, and he was my strongest influence in applying and attending the Law School. He made great friends and regularly told me about concepts he learned in class that “blew his mind.”

I often tell my wife how lucky I am to attend such a great school. I really enjoy classes and the exchange of ideas. I have become a better student and a better person while surrounded by intelligent students and professors with such high integrity.

Braden’s Memory Lane

I am very close to my grandfather. I got to know the Law School while creating a Wikipedia page for him. He has very fond memories of his time teaching at the Law School and it launched him into a long and successful academic career. My grandparents were both emotional when I decided to attend the Law School.

In the library on the third floor is a photo of the Law School faculty during the 1950s. A young version of my grandfather is in the back row surrounded by some of the greatest legal minds of the previous century. I feel very proud walking past the photo and seeing my grandfather.

HAYDEN MILLER, ’16, AND HIS GREAT-GRANDFATHER, JAMES J. MAGNER, 1923

Hayden: It was certainly appealing to know that my great-grandfather attended UChicago Law. It’s nice that there is a connection. My grandmother (James’s daughter) was ecstatic!

I think that his career was exemplary in two ways. He was an attorney who lived for the law; everywhere he went and in every opportunity that he had. He appeared before the Supreme Court twice as well as in federal appellate courts and in Lincoln’s courtroom; these were moments of extreme pride for him.

They represented accomplishments that went beyond making money or winning accolades. For him, it was about being able to contribute to the law in a meaningful way.

He took advantage of opportunities that were presented to him. He didn’t go into practice with a certain expectation of where his career was going to go. He continually showed that he was someone willing to learn. These are two traits I hope to emulate in my career.

Hayden’s Memory Lane

James worked for the Chicago Tribune while he attended the Law School to help pay for his education. He edited the sports column there. He was a member of Sigma Alpha Epsilon fraternity as well as the debate club. He made lifelong friends at the Law School. One of his best friends was someone who escaped the Russian Revolution and became an atomic physicist.
Adrienne: When I ultimately decided on coming to Chicago, family was a big part of that decision. It’s really special to go to a school that meant so much to my relatives and that they had such a big part in shaping. I love having this special bond with both my family and the school, and I would never have that at another school. John Levi, LAB ’65, Edward Levi’s son, is a partner at Sidley and lives in Chicago. He has been so helpful during my time at the Law School, and I couldn’t be more grateful to have him here. I’ve always deeply respected the school’s commitment to ideas and producing excellent thinkers, and I believe Bernie and Ed embodied and furthered that goal.

I’ve had a couple classes where the professor references Ed or Bernie. I remember I was so nervous before taking my Property exam 1L year. When I anxiously opened the test, I saw that Bernie was a character on the exam, wreaking havoc, and that made the exam a lot more fun. Bernie and Ed didn’t just go to UChicago for law school, but also for undergrad, and came back as faculty. They’re clearly very beloved, and I’m so lucky to get to continue in that tradition.

John G. Levi, LAB ’65, on behalf of his father, Edward: Dad would be very proud that a family member, particularly on my mother’s side, is attending the Law School.

Adrienne’s loved her time at the Law School. She’s effervescent and upbeat. She’s had an extraordinary experience.

Dad was very concerned about access to justice and the ability of the law to serve low-income folks. He was very much at the forefront of establishing the Mandel Clinic. I know that Adrienne is thinking about a career in public service and that she’s committed to helping folks.

I know how fortunate she feels to attend the University of Chicago Law School.

Dad would be so proud of what the Law School is today and its standing across the world as one of the leading institutions of legal education. It’s a remarkable place and has turned out many wonderful people. That students like Adrienne want to come and spend three years at the Law School would make him so proud.

John’s Memory Lane

When I decided to go to law school, I wasn’t allowed to apply to Chicago. My father wouldn’t let me. Who would want to be grilled in class by people, now your professors, you’d known your whole life!

I grew up in Hyde Park. My very early recollection of the Law School is from the mid-1950s. I would accompany my dad, who was dean of the school at the time, down to the old law building, Stuart Hall. He would have me dust the desks in the outer offices, primarily to keep a seven-year-old kid occupied on a Saturday morning.

Dad would always have 3L students over for dinner. We looked forward to that function at our house. I would pass the hors d’oeuvres. This was in the 1950s and early 1960s. I’m probably one of the few people that is still around today who attended the cornerstone laying of the new law building in 1958. I was probably 11 years old.

The Meltzers lived five houses down. Bernie was a prince of a person. He taught Labor Law and Evidence. In his living room, with the kids, it was always the Socratic method. We were in and out of his house all the time.

The Law School faculty were the mentors of my youth. They were important people in my development and one of the reasons I became a lawyer.

Dad always thought that he was surrounded by the most phenomenal colleagues at the Law School. It was an extraordinary institution and the faculty represented the best legal minds of the county.
When he became dean in 1950, you’re talking about a period right after WWII, they were rebuilding enrollment and faculty across the University. He was determined to build a tremendous institution and would look back with enormous pride in what UChicago Law has accomplished and the remarkable faculty they’ve put together. The students that have gone through the school and continue to do so have gone on to be at the very top of the legal profession.

Even as dean, he continued to teach. He loved teaching Elements of the Law and Antitrust. We were never allowed to attend any of his classes, because he was surprisingly nervous. He regarded each class with a matter of significance and spent hours preparing for each class. He’d always have butterflies in the morning before classes. He would say, “I’m facing 150 of the brightest minds in the country, so I have to be on my toes.”

After graduating from the Law School, Bernie and Edward went to Washington, DC, during the war and were roommates. They came back to Chicago and married sisters (Kate Sulzberger Levi and Jean Sulzberger Meltzer).

Bernie Meltzer was an institution. He taught past the time of my father and cared so deeply for his advisees. Having them to dinner, and on occasion, I would be invited to drop by too. I continue to run into folks all over the country who had Bernie, or were his advisees, and they revered that man.