

IAFL USA CHAPTER STUDENTSHIP REPORT 2019

It is an honour that the USA chapter of the International Academy of Family Lawyers (IAFL) selected me to travel to Jersey for their 2019 IAFL Studentship. I did not know of the IAFL until my professor suggested I apply for their Studentship and I am so glad I did! My two weeks working under Barbara Corbett at Corbett Le Quesne have been nothing short of amazing.

Coming from the United States, I did not know what to expect from the Jersey legal system. In the weeks leading up to my Studentship, I questioned how dynamic family law on a small island like Jersey could be. However, Corbett Le Quesne over the last two weeks exposed me to cases I would not see in my home state of California. I quickly saw that the firm's work expanded beyond Jersey's borders. In my short two weeks with Barbara Corbett, I saw South African divorce petitions, a Hague convention application, a dispute in Egypt over vaccinations, and the distribution of a Maltese property! The team at Corbett Le Quesne showed me the diversity of family law in Jersey.

On my first day in the office, Barbara Corbett and her team threw me into the deep end. Barbara and her Partner Nicholas Le Quesne allowed me to view proceedings in a high profile multinational child abduction case. As they prepped for the hearing, they helped me understand the facts of the case and additionally Jersey's legal processes. In the courtroom, I watched Barbara transform from welcoming host to fierce advocate in a gown. After the hearing, Barbara asked for my thoughts and feedback about the case. I appreciated how she listened to my thoughts, opinions, and questions about the case.

For the rest of my time at the firm I accompanied Barbara and Nicholas to various legal proceedings. The formal proceedings ranged from observing Nicholas as a criminal court duty advocate to joining Barbara in a nine hour private financial dispute resolution meeting. While the informal meetings included disputes centred around a smoothie recipe and meditation CD. These cases showed me the required flexibility family advocates need to possess to be successful in their cases.

Further, I felt like each day Corbett Le Quesne went above and beyond for their clients. Lizzie, the office manager, without hesitation always welcomed anyone who walked through the firm's doors with a "Hiya", a drink, and if you were lucky a piece of cake. While Iselin, the office paralegal and former news reporter, would talk to clients for hours answering questions about their case. Barbara and Nick always made time to talk to clients even when they had time sensitive things to do. I saw them go to great lengths for their clients, but I also saw them go to great lengths for each other. Commonly, the team relied on each other for help with their cases. Asking questions across the room, strategizing arguments, and using each other's resources to create the best outcomes for their clients. I enjoyed the team environment very much. Entering such a positive, collaborative and encouraging work environment everyday affirmed my choice to join this area of law.

At first, the Jersey legal system did not seem too different from the United States. But behind its charming exterior, Jersey has a distinct way of doing things. For example, the advocates wear black gowns and say the Lord's Prayer in French to open morning court sessions. Unlike the uniformly designed courts back home, Jersey's courts boast oversized chandeliers and paintings of former Bailiffs. The beauty of the courtrooms left me speechless each time I entered them. I do not think I will be able to enter a US courtroom again without noticing the lack of elegance.

Outside of the office or courtroom, the staff encouraged me to explore the island. Within the first week, I watched Lizzie's mother skydive for charity, Nicholas invited me over for a BBQ in his childhood home, and Barbara properly introduced me to mushy peas at the local Fish and Chips shop. Nicholas taught me that swimming in the ocean is an absolutely acceptable and encouraged after work activity. On my lunch breaks, I ate my way through St. Helier's town centre. I am particularly fond of the £3 sandwiches from the Market, which I miss dearly. On my weekends, I walked to new parishes and enjoyed the beach when there was nice weather. Any time they took me to court, Barbara or Nicholas taught me a new piece of Jersey history. The history on some parts of this island is older than the United States! Lizzie took me to help her parish decorate their float for the Battle of the Flowers, a huge Jersey summer event. We even had a firm sunset picnic at St. Ouen's Bay! The island is filled with so many activities I could not do them all within my two weeks.

One of the most impactful moments of my studentship happened when Barbara took me to visit family court judge and IAFL member Samantha McFadzean. I have never talked to a judge in such an intimate setting. Our conversation covered how little actions can affect collaboration between parties and how legal changes impact the people that need it most. I also had the chance to talk to her about my thoughts on where Jersey family law lacked support. For example, no fault divorce and birth certificates for same sex parents during surrogacy. After our conversation, she took me on a tour of the Royal Court. She even let me go into the "judges only" areas. It was a great view behind the scenes of the Jersey courthouse.

Overall, my two weeks working under Barbara Corbett at Corbett Le Quesne have been nothing short of amazing. Helping the firm create tangible results for real families is an experience I will hold onto as I enter into my legal career. I cannot thank the IAFL, my Professor Jo Carrillo, and most importantly the team at Corbett Le Quesne enough for this wonderful opportunity. You all made me have the experience of a lifetime and I am so humbled by it.

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