

In April of this year I learned I had been fortunate enough to be selected to undertake a Travel Studentship in the summer, funded by the IAFL and Mills & Reeve. Some weeks later, I was introduced to my hosts via e-mail, booked my flights to Boston, Massachusetts, and began looking forward to my first transatlantic trip. I was very excited about the experience, but still I was blown away by the hospitality of my hosts at home and at work, the breadth of opportunities to engage with the legal system and experts within it, and the wonderful sights I saw.

I was greeted at the airport by Anne Berger, who was kind enough to welcome me into her home for the duration of my stay, act as my guide to Massachusetts, and whose stories and advice from her years of practicing family law I will never forget. Jeff Soilson of Fitch Law Partners LLP was my host for the work placement there, and everyone at Fitch was very welcoming and helpful, whether it was by taking me along to court to see the talented attorneys of the firm in action, offering lunch recommendations or enlightening me on Bostonian slang.



Aside from the striking immediate difference of a single profession of attorneys as opposed to the English bifurcation of barristers and solicitors, there were plenty of surprises awaiting me in the Massachusetts courts. On the very first morning of my placement at Fitch, I arrived in Middlesex Probate and Family Court to discover that most family proceedings are completely open to the public (unlike in England and Wales), and as the judge will often have several motions scheduled to be heard that day, all the parties and counsel waiting to be heard on their motions sit or stand in the back of a packed courtroom. While the merits of the approach might be questioned, it provided a great opportunity for me to see multiple different proceedings in one morning, as the motions were for the most part very short and dealt with in a quickfire manner.



Outside the office and the courtroom, I was sure to take advantage of my first time in the US, exploring the sights in and around Boston and learning more about the history of the area. I was also very lucky that Anne was scheduled to attend a meeting in Kansas City, Missouri, on the first full weekend of my visit, and was kind enough to take me along with her.



So, I can now say I've been to two states! The meeting was of the Editorial Board of the Journal of the American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers. The Board was a very friendly group of highly experienced and knowledgeable family law professionals, making the meeting and weekend enjoyable, fascinating and very inspiring. The Board works with the UMKC School of Law, which meant I also had the opportunity to meet law students who kindly gave me a tour of the school.

I also got the chance to attend a family law class at Suffolk University Law School thanks to Marc-Daniel Paul, an employee at Fitch who is also a second-year law student. This was a great experience, as having seen the differences between the American and English legal systems, I was now seeing the differences between an American and English legal education. A discussion ensued between students and professor on the interpretation of cases defining the concepts of marriage and marital privacy (which I was not quite brave enough to intervene in). The importance of the Bill of Rights and the equal protection and due process clauses of the Fourteenth Amendment to the US Constitution in family law was particularly interesting to me, as somewhat analogous to the European Convention on Human Rights' significance to English family law.

I really enjoyed learning about Massachusetts law and undertaking research tasks to find out more. The work I was given at Fitch was very interesting and enabled me to think about the differences from English law. This also came out in discussions with lawyers at the firm and during my time in Kansas City. This made the studentship a very rewarding work experience placement, as I was challenged not only to see the practical, as opposed to academic or theoretical, aspects of family law, but to consider a new academic framework and then to see it in action.

I decided to remain in Boston for a few days after my time at Fitch came to an end, to continue to explore the city and surrounding areas, which are filled with historical and cultural points of interest. Anne's grandchildren also treated me to fun sporting activities, teaching me how to paddleboard and explaining the rules of baseball to me at my first game, supporting the Boston Red Sox at Fenway Park. Boston is without a doubt one of the most interesting places I have ever visited, and my experience would not have been possible without the support of the IAFL and Mills & Reeve.

I cannot express my gratitude to the IAFL and Mills & Reeve for funding the studentship, to Caitlin Jenkins who supported me through the entire process of organising my trip, and to the members of the Cambridge Faculty of Law who facilitate this programme and who were responsible for inspiring my interest in family law in the first place. Furthermore, a simple 'thank you' is not enough for Jeff and everyone at Fitch who gave me the opportunity to see the inner workings of a Massachusetts firm and made me feel so welcome, or for Anne and her entire family who were the best hosts I could ask for. But it will have to do for now!

This was honestly the most rewarding experience of my life, and I would encourage anyone with an interest in family law who has the opportunity to apply for this programme to do so.

Amber Turner
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