



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

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EJA FELLOWSHIP RECIPIENT



NAME	Sawyer Maher
LAW SCHOOL	DePaul Law
ORGANIZATION	Greater Boston Legal Services

Final Reflection:

"Oh, you were in the Wild West, huh?"

I hadn't thought of small claims courts in that way until, a couple weeks removed from my summer internship in the consumer rights unit at Greater Boston Legal Services, I was recounting my work experience over the previous few months to a consumer law professor at my school as he made that comment.

In the preceding days, I had gotten the chance to speak to a number of my fellow newly minted 2Ls about their summers. Many of them had worked for larger firms or for judges or for small family offices. In my conversations with them, I soon realized that something that had become commonplace for me throughout the summer – introducing myself to a client in the lobby of the courthouse, asking if they'd like representation, wrangling with opposing counsel to get whatever documents they had brought to court that day, combing through said documents to construct an argument, and then presenting said argument to a clerk magistrate and the counsel of debt collectors all within the span of 45 minutes or so – was markedly different from a lot of the other experiences.

Prior to law school, I had spent a little over two years as a community organizer in Houston, TX. While difficult, frustrating, and confusing at times, the work felt tied to tangible things - people, neighborhoods, institutions. I would come home some days from various important meetings or a big organized "action" that had me on my feet for a number of hours and I would feel weary but proud in a very specific way. I would be in dress shoes, nice slacks, and a button-down shirt,



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but I'd also be sweating. It felt somewhat incongruent, but also fitting for what the work was. You were, in an organized and precise manner, fervently engaging in the arena of public life.

When I decided to go to law school, a small part of me worried I would never get that feeling or something akin to it, again. Either through inertia, the nature of legal work, or my own limits, I wouldn't experience a side of the law that felt fully ensconced in the messy tangle of public life. Over the course of my 1L year, it became apparent to me that there existed this abstract lawyer archetype who was interested (or obsessed) with the law for its own sake. The documents, the opinions, the words on paper – they were ends unto themselves and existed detached from actual people. I did not want to be that archetype.

I had chosen consumer law because, like organizing, it felt like an avenue to connect people to the bigger forces shaping their lives and assist them in pushing back against them. I chose the internship opportunity in the consumer unit at Greater Boston Legal Services because it felt like a way to do just that, in a highly tangible way, in a city I love. After 10 weeks of work, 10 weeks in which I went from never having never witnessed any sort of court proceeding before to actually representing people before clerk magistrates and helping them save \$1000+ in the matter of an hour, I can confidently say I am more sure of my decision to pursue this field of law than ever before.

Thanks to the generosity of Equal Justice America and their fellowship opportunity, I got real, hands-on experience working on consumer protection issues at the hyper-local, hyper-individual level - experience that included the development of invaluable client relation skills, time-sensitive issue spotting skills, and real courtroom litigation skills. I have taken all of these things back with me to Chicago and DePaul where I am leading the effort to bring a consumer protection student organization to the school - one complete with (hopefully) real opportunities for DePaul students to assist at nearby small claims courts. I also know my experience over the summer will remain with me for years to come as I begin what I hope will be a long career in the wide and varied realm of consumer protection law.