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**Personal Narrative in Dear Sisters, Dear Daughters: Words of
Wisdom From Multicultural Women Attorneys Who've Been There
and Done That**

Penelope Andrews



Dear Sisters, Dear Daughters,

I was born in Cape Town, South Africa, and now I am a Law Professor in New York City. My legal career has been more rewarding than I ever could have imagined growing up in South Africa. In the next few pages, I want to share with you why this has been so and also to indicate to you some ways of overcoming the pitfalls that certainly will befall you in a profession that is slowly moving away from its largely-white and largely-male edifice and history.

I happened on the law when I studied at the University of Natal in Durban, majoring in Economic History and African Politics. While pursuing my B.A., I was employed as a coordinator at the Legal Aid Clinic at the university. The experience there piqued my curiosity about law and its possibilities and limitations. I obtained a scholarship to study law, and when I graduated I joined a public interest law firm in Johannesburg.

From my vantage point as a student activist in South Africa, the civil rights movement in the United States excited my views on the possibilities of law. I was energized by the civil rights movement, by the way it challenged the fundamental underpinnings of American society and forced Americans to come to terms with the civil rights demands of black Americans, and later women and other minorities. I was particularly struck by the impressive array of legal leaders this movement generated. All these fueled my desire to spend time in the United States, and I obtained a scholarship to do my Masters in Law at Columbia Law School.

With my LL.M. in hand, I started an internship with the NAACP Legal Defense Fund in New York City. As I had expected, the caliber of the attorneys working there and the kinds of cases that engaged them was admirable. Mostly I was proud to be at this historic place and thrilled at the cachet of being at the major civil rights legal organization in this country. After a brief stint at the NAACP Legal Defense Fund, I went back to Columbia Law School as the Chamberlain Fellow in Legislation, where I researched worker rights and public interest legal possibilities in South Africa.

What I found most beneficial during the time that I spent in law school in South Africa and the United States was the advice and guidance I obtained from mentors. I have been mentored by men and women, black and white, and their counsel smoothed the way for me as I negotiated my professional identity and my place in the world of law. For women entering the profession, mentoring is essential.

In early 1986, I moved to Australia to teach law. By then, although the practice of law was of great interest to me, the possibilities of teaching law suddenly appeared quite extensive, and I decided in a moment of adventure to go to Australia to teach law.

Teaching law in Australia turned out to be quite exciting. I was exposed to a new legal environment and accumulated skills and knowledge that would stand me in good stead as my research and scholarship became more comparative and international. From the comparative experiences of the United States and South Africa, I began to analyze and appreciate Australia's troubled issues of race relations and the search to find a solution to the problems confronting indigenous people and other minorities there. Although I enjoyed living and teaching in Australia, and acquired valuable insight into the intersection of race, gender, and the law, I was drawn back to New York City, with its tremendous cultural, intellectual, and political challenges. In 1992, I moved back to New York City to take up a professor-

ship at the City University of New York School of Law.

Leaving a tenured law teaching position in Australia was a frightening prospect, but it provided another challenge and one that I have not regretted. Teaching at an institution committed to training public interest lawyers, and teaching students the ethical values in lawyering that I treasure dearly, have been rewarding experiences. Amongst others subjects, I teach International Human Rights Law, which seems so appropriate at this stage of my career. The experiences, comparative and international, to which I've been exposed, have not only furthered my understanding and knowledge of the universe of International Human Rights Law, but have also confirmed my belief that all our struggles for equality and social justice are international in character.

My coming of age as a lawyer coincided with the emergence of the era of globalization, so confident and ubiquitous now. At the same time that legal practice has become more specialized, it has also become more globalized. And as contested as the notion of globalization may seem, legal norms (both human rights and trade and economics) have become so internationalized that all of us engaged in lawyering are implicated in these developments. I belong to many international organizations and have traveled to many countries on all continents. I am the secretary of the International Third World Legal Studies Association. I belong to the African Studies Association of Australia and the United States and I am a member of the American Society of International Law and the Law and Society Association. For those of you entering the profession, or seeking to expand your law practice, there are a host of international organizations with local counterparts that provide valuable human and legal resources.

I am a single woman with no children, and I'm not sure whether these are active, predetermined choices, or whether they just happened. I suspect, though, that my career choices, and particularly the requirement to be mobile, have contributed to my current status, which I enjoy. It allows me to mentor law students in

ways that may have not been possible if I had family commitments. The most rewarding and the happiest times for me are when students graduate or obtain satisfying jobs and come back to share their experiences and their new lives as lawyers. The saddest times are when students do not live up to their potential, or when as lawyers they succumb to the cynicism of law practice generated by excessive and stressful workloads.

All of the above is a way of saying that the best advice I can give to you, prospective lawyers, is to maintain a sense of openness, be flexible, and continue expanding your legal and intellectual boundaries. My travels and my experiences on three continents in many ways mirror what the legal profession has become, a community linked by international trade and international concerns. I do believe that to succeed in the legal profession, whatever our indicators of success, we need to be flexible and willing to adapt to change. These are cliches, but they are also true. I find myself now a tenured law professor, very satisfied and mostly optimistic about the possibilities for law graduates, particularly female law graduates of color. Optimism is a key to excelling in the profession. For women of color, the twin processes of racism and sexism, often lurking in unexpected places, can be deleterious. The kind of optimism that I refer to is one that recognizes the need to challenge invidious attitudes where they surface, but also to overcome in the face of them. The universe of law for minorities and for women is a much more accessible and exciting one than it used to be. The challenge for you is to find your place in the profession and to attempt to do the ordinary things of law extraordinarily well.

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