

Washington DC

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In October 2013, I was fortunate enough to be awarded a Pegasus Scholarship, primarily based in Washington, DC. Having been called to the New York State Bar in 2010, I was interested to see how the practice of law played out 'on the ground'. During my six-week stay, the American Inns of Court provided a remarkable placement programme, diverse in subject matter and nature, greatly surpassing my expectations.

Benjamin Cardozo, Supreme Court Justice, once stated, *"History, in illuminating the past, illuminates the present, and in illuminating the present, illuminates the future."* The placement committee had certainly taken these wise words to heart, and I was taken on a journey of the practice of law with a visit to 'the birthplace of America', Independence Hall in Philadelphia, to the heart of the Freedom Trail in Boston and onto the Supreme Court of the United States, a building of dignity and gravitas in the heart of Capitol Hill.

One of the real highlights of the programme came in my first week in Washington, when I had the opportunity to hear oral arguments at the Supreme Court. As I walked up the steps of this magnificent building and into the court room, I gathered the sense of solemn responsibility on the part of the advocates and justices that (former Supreme Court Justice) Hugo Lafayette Black described, to, *"translate into living law and to maintain the constitutional shield for the benefit of every human being"*. Prior to the oral argument, I was afforded the opportunity to discuss the case, involving the Fifth Amendment right not to be compelled to testify against oneself, with a distinguished Supreme Court attorney and to witness a run through of the argument on behalf of the appellant at a moot at Georgetown Law. Somewhat surprisingly, the attorney was met by a much harsher tribunal in the university professors than the Justices themselves!

I was surprised to hear of the breadth of subject matter that Supreme Court advocates deal with as part of their practice. Their remarkable skill lies in handling complex subject matter with brevity and flair, rather

than focusing on one area of legal practice. Their talent is evident both in written briefs filed and through the strict time limits imposed during oral arguments, each side typically having 30 minutes with a constant flow of judicial intervention. I noted the much greater emphasis on written advocacy at differing levels of the legal system in the US as compared with the position in the UK. The Supreme Court experience was finished off in true style with the American Inns of Court 'Celebration of Excellence', a dinner hosted by Justice Thomas in the Supreme Court building itself.

Being a family practitioner, dealing with financial remedy and child law matters, I also thoroughly enjoyed shadowing a judge in the District Court of DC and the Fairfax County Circuit Court in divorce and contact proceedings and discussing principles, which are applied in public law children matters. Proceedings overall seemed much more parent focused. I spoke of the 26 week timetable in public law matters with an experienced District Judge in Washington, a far cry from the mandatory one year period in DC, during which no orders can be made which permanently sever parental ties, the emphasis being on ploughing in a vast array of rehabilitative services and treatment for parents of a child with social care involvement. The debate was a fascinating one, with both sides respectful of the merits and shortfalls of each other's systems.

Aside from the valuable legal opportunity to meet with and shadow eminent members of the profession and judiciary, I was also exposed to the world of American politics, the highlight of which was spending time in a Senator's office. I have to admit being a little star-struck on seeing President Obama at the Memorial Day service at Arlington!

I am extremely grateful to the Pegasus Trust for funding my placement, which has enhanced both my legal and personal development, and has provided me with fond and lasting memories.

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