



LWI LIVES

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LWI Lives is a regular electronic publication of the “Faces of LWI” Committee, which explores and communicates the emerging identity of LWI and its members. We have in common the commitment to being the best legal writing professors that we can be. But we are multi-dimensional people with different strengths, interests, curiosities, and gifts. By profiling individuals in our community, we hope to expand and develop our understanding of who we are and what we aspire to be.

Susan Smith Bakhshian: Advocate for Students



By Stephanie Rae Williams

I met Loyola Law School Clinical Professor of Law and Director of Bar Programs Susan Smith Bakhshian many years ago, when we were both filling LRW vacancies at Whittier Law School. Susan is beloved by legal writing teaching veterans and students alike.

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Tessa Dysart: “Ecke momen Mvhayv”



By Tiffany Atkins

I first interviewed Tessa (Platt) Dysart, Assistant Director of Legal Writing and Clinical Professor of Law, and proud member of the Muscogee (Creek) Tribe, coincidentally, on Indigenous Peoples’ Day, October 12, 2020. For my first LWI Lives article, I wanted to feature a Native law professor in honor of Native American History Month, and found in Tessa a warm and friendly conversationalist who sees teaching and mentoring students as an honor similar to motherhood.

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Lori Johnson: From Transactions to Teaching



By Adam Eckart

As a kid, Lori Johnson was not particularly called to education or the law. But an internship in college and the type of work she completed during that internship changed the trajectory of her career—twice.

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Contributors to this Edition:

- Tiffany Atkins
- Adam Eckart
- Rebecca Rich
- Stephanie Williams

Susan Bakhshian

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I suspect she has not appeared in *LWI Lives* before only because she is incredibly humble. Playing on our long friendship—Susan is my first Los Angeles friend—and the fact our husbands like each other too, I persuaded Susan to share some of her teaching and personal favorites. In chatting with Susan for this article, two themes emerged again and again: Susan fights for students and bar takers, especially first-generation and nontraditional students, and she is a funny, grounded, genuinely warm person.

Susan grew up near Pasadena, California, and was the first in her family to attend college. She attended Loyola Law School Los Angeles in the evening program. While Susan had all of the challenges our first-generation students face, she graduated with honors, and met her husband, Varouj, at Loyola too. Now, she loves teaching, especially in the evening division.

Susan teaches first-year and upper division writing classes, as well as Remedies, Ethics, California Civil Procedure, Privacy Torts, and Fundamentals of Bar Exam Writing. She believes her roots as an evening student give her an immediate connection and credibility with her students. In 2018, the student body voted Susan the Loyola Law School Professor of the Year for the Evening Division.

I asked Susan what she likes best about teaching, and she explained: “what I love about teaching is the cliché—making a difference. But not making a difference in the big ways. I don’t expect to teach a student who will become the most famous advocate.” Instead, Susan loves making “a difference in little ways with the students who are like I was—first generation, evening,” and without any connections to lawyers. “Making those students realize they belong here and helping them on the journey is the best.”

Susan has published often in the California and national press on the inequities in the bar exam process. For years, she has tirelessly advocated for a lower cut score in California and for a process more fair to minority and underprivileged students.

Fun Facts about Susan Many Students Find Surprising

- She loves Disneyland and has been a passholder for 24 years.
- She’s an old-school Dodgers fan, and her favorite restaurants/bars are the concession stands at Dodger Stadium.
- She feeds any creature who stops by her yard, including feral cats and baby raccoons.
- She has 4 tattoos and 10 piercings (when in Los Angeles . . .).
- Her daughter Katie almost made the Canadian Olympic Softball Team, and Susan still keeps score in her head after many years watching Katie.



Professor of the Year Award Winners Susan (Evening Division) and Kevin Lapp (Day Division)

Last month, Susan was even quoted by USA Today on Kamala Harris’s bar exam record and the way bar exams disadvantage non-privileged students. Susan told me: “the best writing I have ever done is in the last three op-eds I wrote attacking the California Supreme Court’s” 2020 online bar exam. In fact, “I had thought nothing would top the adrenaline rush of jury verdicts in my clients’ favor, but this was so much better.” For years, Susan “refused every publisher who asked” her to write a book, but “because of a dear friend [she] made at a legal writing conference, Wanda Temm,” Susan agreed to co-author the latest edition of *Clearing the Last Hurdle: Mapping Success on the California Bar Exam*. The book reflects Susan’s humorous, pragmatic style and shows her focus on success for all students.

Students appreciate Susan for more than her advocacy, however. Students told me Susan is a gifted teacher who is clearly brilliant, but also personable

Susan Bakhshian

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and down-to-earth. They commented on how she is fun, and irreverent, yet pushes them intellectually and thinks deeply about how to best help them learn. Susan's top "facts students find surprising about me, but like," include her love of Disneyland and the Dodgers, her daughter's high school and college softball career, her tattoos (it's LA, after all), and the way she feeds strays.

Susan tells law students to choose journals, moot court teams, and externships carefully. She suggests they not fixate on what they are missing by foregoing some opportunities, and select a few meaningful extracurriculars instead, so they still have time for family and studies. One way Susan walks this talk is with Disneyland. Susan and her daughter, Katie, share a love of Disneyland, and they've been Disney passholders since Katie, now twenty-seven years old, was three. Susan took the call offering her the LRW job at Loyola years ago from Disneyland. She has managed to balance work and family, including caring for her extended family, with creativity and many late nights.

In addition to a love for Disney, Susan and Katie also share a tattoo and softball. Susan told me: "I have four tattoos and 10 ear piercings, which for California means I really need to get a few more." Every tattoo she has includes a heart. "The first one I ever got is behind my left ear—a string of three hearts—one for me, my husband, and my daughter, who has the identical tattoo behind her ear." For years, Katie played softball, and Susan still keeps score in her head while watching games after all the years she kept score for Katie. Susan's favorite softball memories are "trips to Surrey, BC, Montreal, and Toronto, when Katie was invited to try out for the Canadian National Softball Team. The amount of talent and grit in those women was a sight to behold." Susan will never forget "Katie's grace at missing the cut for the final roster of 19 women, but making the final 22." In a lesson Susan shares with her students, Katie learned "heart break can be channeled into something good—Katie is now the pitching coach at Glendale Community College."



Susan and Katie at Katie's wedding



Susan in the Dodgers Dugout

Katie's wedding was the "last of the 250 person events in Los Angeles in March, 2020. In true Los Angeles style, we had the wedding at a venue where lots of television and movies were filmed." Susan's mother-in-law made Katie's wedding dress, just like she made Susan's dress years earlier. They cut lace from Susan's dress for pocket squares for the groom and Varouj. You can see the Hollywood glamour in Susan's favorite picture of Katie and her from the wedding.

Describing herself as "an old school Dodgers fan," Susan shared, "I turn the radio on to listen and then I line up the recording on television so that I can 'watch' the games but hear the hometown call on the radio because the national announcers make me crazy." Continuing the Dodgers theme, Susan said her favorite restaurants or bars are "the concession stands at Dodger stadium." As she noted, this is "probably not the classiest answer you will get from a law professor, but it is an honest one. I love it there." This answer shows the fun and openness students and colleagues love about Susan.

To get in touch with Susan, you can email her at Susan.Bakhshian@lls.edu.

Tessa Dysart

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This mother and teacher, translated to “Ecke momen Mvhayv” in Mvskoke, the native tongue of the Muscogee (Creek), finds joy in watching her students grow during law school, and being able to support them in their divergent journeys to becoming lawyers and advocates. This lesson, on the importance of knowing and following your individual passions and strengths, was taught to Tessa and her siblings at an early age and is one she continues to teach her own students and children today.

Growing up in rural Oregon, Tessa was the middle child of her family consisting of her mother, father, older brother and younger sister. As the middle child, Tessa was very concerned with fairness, equity, and reading as many books as she could get her little hands on during her trips to the library. These library trips weren’t frequent, but they centered Tessa’s adolescence, nonetheless. Trips to the “big town” as Tessa called it weren’t thirty minutes long, they were “two library trips long,” which was how young Tessa measured time and distance then. Tessa and her siblings developed a strong sense of self-

worth and determination from their parents, who were entrepreneurs that instilled in the Platt kids the importance of finding your strengths and using them well. For Tessa’s older brother, who was great with his hands and fixing things, this led to a mechanical career and owning his own construction company; and for her sister who loved working with others, led her to involvement in her church, a cosmetology career, and later, activism on her local school board. For Tessa, who was inclined toward reading novels and literature, her strengths led her, eventually, to Harvard Law School and later, to a career in legal education.



Tessa and Andrew

After finishing high school, Tessa enrolled at Willamette—“rhymes with ‘dammit’” she joked during our interview—University, where she studied Russian history. After graduating with honors, Tessa deferred her admission to Harvard Law School for one year in order to accept a Fulbright with the Moscow Institute for Advanced Studies. Upon enrolling at Harvard Law in 2002, Tessa joined HUNAP, the Harvard University Native American Program and NLSA, the Native Law Student Association, where she connected even more with her Native community and colleagues.

After graduating, Tessa clerked for a year, before joining the Senate Judiciary Committee during the Bush Administration, where she worked on policy and judicial selection. Soon after, Tessa accepted an adjunct position at Regent University School of Law, where she was later hired as an Assistant Professor, beginning the start of a teaching career that has spanned nearly ten years.

Tessa’s Abiding Love.

After speaking with Tessa, it’s clear how much she loves teaching, but Tessa’s greatest love is for her family: her husband, Andrew, son, James, two and a half, and her infant daughter, Vera, 5 months. Tessa met her husband after law school while she was working at the Department of Justice, and he, a Marine Corps veteran, was using the GI bill to finish college. Andrew went on to study law at Regent University, where coincidentally, Tessa was later hired as an adjunct. No, her husband was never in her class, but several of his friends were, making her the envy of the faculty for knowing the latest student gossip.

Tessa and Andrew began trying for children during his last year of law school; however, the journey to motherhood took Tessa on an unexpected path with loss, heartache, and unexpected joy along the way—joy that came in the form of adoption. Tessa is a proud adoptive mom of two children, James and Vera, who joined the Dysart family through a private adop-

Tessa Dysart

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tion agency. James joined the Dysart family in 2018, not long after the couple's move to Arizona. Tessa was presenting at an appellate law conference in Arkansas when she got the unexpected cell phone call that her son was ready to be picked up. After a frantic, yet thrilling online shopping trip for baby supplies, Tessa's husband installed their brand new car seat and picked up their son, James, at the hospital. The very next day, Tessa boarded a plane and flew home, where Andrew and James were waiting at the airport. Describing the experience of looking into her son's eyes for the very first time as "overwhelming," she also recognized it as the exact moment she knew James was meant for their family.

Vera's adoption took place in Arizona this past summer, when once again, Tessa was gearing up for a legal conference presentation! (Anyone else noticing a trend??) While going over her talking points for CALI-Con, the adoption agency called, once again, with wonderfully disruptive news: a baby girl was just born at a nearby hospital, and the Dysarts needed to get there right away. Interrupting her husband's telephone trial happening in their kitchen, Tessa confirmed the placement, packed a diaper bag, and was off to meet their daughter. The experience of seeing Vera for the first time was no less magical than with James, and once again Tessa knew that this baby was meant for them.

For our final interview, Tessa and I met on Zoom, where she balanced talking to me, making medical appointments, and bouncing GORGEOUS baby Vera on her shoulder, but she did it all with a contented smile. Achieving balance as a mom of two during a pandemic isn't easy; when Tessa isn't mommin', teaching, mentoring and supporting fellow first-gen students, or working with Arizona's NLSA chapter, she finds joy in reading books and introducing her children to some of her favorite stories like *The Happy Hollisters*. She and her husband are DIY'ers who are currently renovating their home, and they also dream of one day travelling the Midwest in a camper on an adventure in the Great Outdoors with their children.

With Vera and James rounding out the Dysart family, Tessa feels more empowered as a mother, and even through the challenges of pandemic parenting, is taking it all in stride. Speaking to students recently, Tessa said this about motherhood: "it's the hardest job I've ever had, but also the most rewarding job." As for how Tessa plans to teach her children about her Native heritage and culture, she's thankful for the diverse community she's found in Tucson, where her children can learn about their mom's Native American heritage, but also about all the other rich threads in their family tapestry. In a lesson handed down from her parents, Tessa wants each of her children to know and embrace their individual gifts and strengths, which makes Tessa grateful for the diversity of Tucson where her husband and son can connect with their Latino culture, and baby Vera, her Asian-Pacific Islander roots.

Among all the things Tessa Dysart must be thankful for, I am certain her beautiful family is at the top of her list; a family connected by the love of this "Ecke momen Mvhayv."

You can connect with Tessa on Twitter at @TessaDysart and on the Appellate Advocacy Blog at https://lawprofessors.typepad.com/appellate_advocacy/.

Author's Note: Many thanks to the members of the Mvskoke Language Program for their help with this translation! To hear more in Mvskoke, visit their culture and history page: <https://www.mcn-nsn.gov/services/mvskoke-language-program/>.



Tessa with her kids
James and Vera



Tessa with her mother and grandmother

Lori Johnson

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Lori's story begins with her surrounded by a big family with 18 first cousins in Buffalo, New York. While following her family's footsteps into education was not on Lori's radar as a kid, negotiating the deal was. Growing up in a multigenerational household with her parents, siblings, two uncles, and grandparents, Lori was a deal lawyer before she knew what one was—navigating different personalities, learning about others, and figuring things out (including the books she was reading, board games she was playing, and puzzles she was solving).

The first in her family to attend college away from home, Lori enrolled in the University of Notre Dame. Perhaps her eventual interest in travel, in part, fueled her enrollment away from home. At Notre Dame, Lori excelled in academics, and in life. She met her husband, Sam; discovered a love of travel while studying abroad in London; and honed her love of reading and writing with a major in English Literature. When Lori's otherwise very supportive parents expressed some concern about the employment prospects for an English major, Lori added a minor in American Studies, which began to spark her interest in the law.

In a summer job back in Buffalo, Lori went to work for a real estate law firm. In this position, Lori assisted in residential real estate closings, often helping people buy their first home. Here, Lori began to love the productive nature of transactional lawyering—working directly with clients to help them achieve a goal, working collaboratively with opposing counsel, and solving problems in order to get the deal across the finish line.

In addition to her residential real estate work that summer, Lori also spent part of the summer bundling documents from residential real estate mortgages. She was tasked with organizing and copying the mortgage files, which were then sent off and resold to large financial institutions. The large financial institutions often used these bundled mortgages as underlying collateral to create and sell mortgage-backed securities and collateralized debt obligations. Unbeknownst to Lori (or any of us), these bundled mortgages would later become infamous in connection with the market collapse of 2008 and would spur Lori's move from practice to academia.



Lori, Sam, and their kids, Evelyn and Kyle, on the sidelines at a Notre Dame game



Lori and Sam, Forbidden City in Beijing, China

After graduating from Notre Dame, Lori and Sam moved to Chicago where Lori attended Northwestern Law. During law school, Lori cultivated her knowledge of law and business, enrolling in many cross-listed MBA/JD courses, and expanded her love for travel, visiting Japan, China, Hong Kong, and spending three weeks backpacking around Europe after the bar exam. She also set in motion her future as a transactional professor, at least on paper. In a sign of what was to come later in her career, Lori was selected as a Pritzker Research Fellow and was assigned to work with Professor Susan Irion in establishing the first transactional drafting course at Northwestern.

Lori's career after law school continued to focus on transactional matters, first at Winston & Strawn in Chicago and then at Snell & Wilmer in Las Vegas. In both cities, Lori worked on matters related to real estate, corporate law, mergers and acquisitions, and commercial finance, assisting in closing several multi-billion dollar deals at Winston & Strawn and working with major casino properties on the strip in Las Vegas. Over the years, Lori enjoyed the work, including the creative problem solving needed to execute the deal. After all, it wasn't unlike the puzzles and board games she completed with her big family back in Buffalo.

Lori Johnson

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In 2008, the bundled real estate mortgages re-entered Lori's story, setting off a chain of events that led to the economic collapse of 2008 and the Great Recession. Lori's transactional work dried up; she billed just 16 hours that August. Given Lori's real estate expertise and her firm's headquarters in one of the hardest-hit real estate markets at the time, Lori's work transitioned to foreclosures, bankruptcies, and litigation. Instead of the collaborative productive work she had done most of her career, Lori found herself tearing apart commercial real estate deals.

Lori realized that a change was on the horizon and began to connect with friends and mentors to explore a career in academia. As luck would have it, UNLV needed someone to teach a transactional drafting course. Lori was the perfect fit. Lori joined UNLV full-time in 2010 and currently holds a rank of Associate Professor of Law. There, Lori has taught Legal Writing, Contract Drafting, Business Organizations, and Professional Responsibility. In addition, Lori has written and presented on the intersections of transactional legal practice, ethics, and rhetoric.

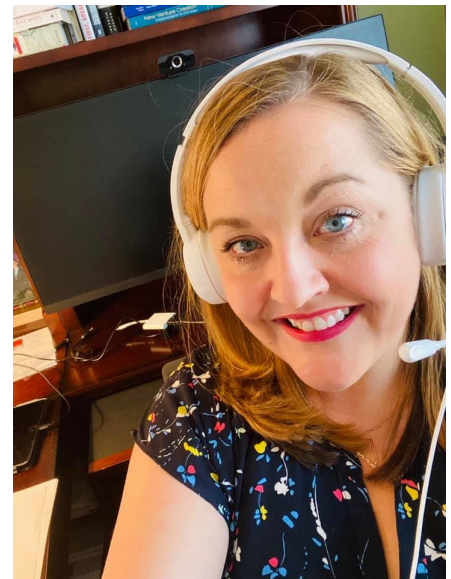
While Lori's life in Las Vegas is a little different than what it was in Buffalo or Chicago, many elements remain the same. She remains surrounded by family—including her husband, two children, two dogs, and extended family. She remains true to her transactional core, juggling roles as professor, mom, volunteer, reader, and traveler. Mom to Kyle (age 9) and Evelyn (age 7), instead of juggling multiple mergers and real estate closings, Lori juggles her own schedule with that of Kyle's—baseball and swimming—and Evelyn's—swimming, gymnastics and softball. On winter weekends Lori can often be found prepping for class or grading papers in the Lee Canyon Ski Resort Lodge, just north of Las Vegas, while her kids ski with their local team. Lori's love for reading remains ever-present (she leads a "Lawyer Mom" book club) and her love for travel also remains (she traveled back to Asia and Europe in recent years and hopes to travel again soon—perhaps to Brazil or Peru).

Although so much of what Lori does in her professional life is impressive, Lori's work in the community and as a mentor may be most impressive of all. Lori is a Board Member of the Notre Dame Alumni Club of Las Vegas where she helps a diverse group of students (including first-generation students) and their families in their journey to Notre Dame. Having been a first generation student herself, Lori and the Alumni Club help these students by providing each with a small scholarship, mentoring, and support.

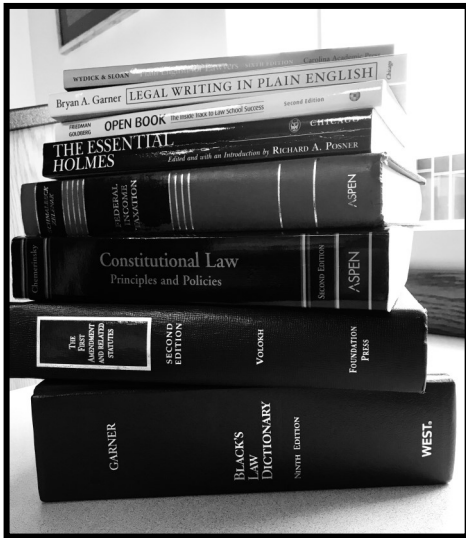
This mentorship finds its way to Lori's professional life as well, including as the coach of the Transactional LawMeets teams at UNLV and as a sounding board for students. Recognizing that her college internship helped establish her career trajectory, Lori is always looking for ways to help students obtain internships and post-grad work, especially in transactional fields where identifying opportunities are challenging. Additionally, Lori and her husband, along with several other investors, founded and incorporated Las Vegas' newest community bank in 2019. Their involvement with the bank has been very uplifting during the COVID-19 crisis, as it has been instrumental in keeping several many businesses afloat.

Like for all of us, the pandemic has shifted Lori's personal and professional life. Honoring her inner transactional lawyer, however, Lori has found a way to make it all work—just like in her work closing mega-mergers in Chicago. Lori has re-worked her law school courses to online formats, figured out how to facilitate learning for her kids, adapted her "Lawyer Mom" book club to an online format, and replaced her family's much-anticipated May 2020 European vacation with virtual classes from around the world. Despite all of the challenges, Lori has enjoyed the slower pace of life and the opportunity to spend more time with her family, including solving puzzles and playing board games, just like she did back in Buffalo.

To get in touch with Lori, you can find her on Twitter at [@LoriDelaneyJ](#) or email her at lori.johnson@unlv.edu.



Lori teaching remotely during COVID



LWI Lives Selection Process

The LWI Lives Committee is organized into three teams, and each team is responsible for selecting, proposing, and writing the three profiles in each issue. To ensure a diverse newsletter, teams propose individual names to the Co-Chairs, and the Co-Chairs review the suggestions to ensure a wide range of coverage over time.

If you have someone in mind who we should put on the list for a future newsletter, please feel free to email any of the committee members listed below. If you could include a note explaining why you think the individual's profile would be particularly interesting, it will help us in developing priorities.

Committee Members



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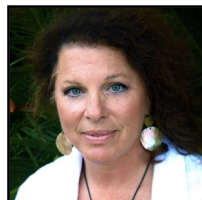
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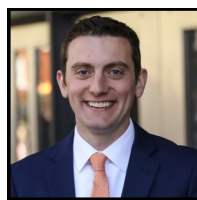
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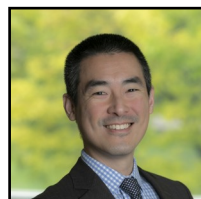
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