

A French philosopher once said, “Without people, nothing is possible; without institutions, nothing is lasting.” No educational institution achieves greatness merely because it survives the test of time. If that were the case, Brooklyn Law School would have attained its preeminence simply by virtue of its 110-year history. Brooklyn Law School is a prestigious law school today in large part because of its most vital resources: the alumni and friends who through their steadfast support of the school assure its continued path of excellence.

In this feature, we highlight just a few of the outstanding members of the BLS community who have made significant contributions to the Law School’s development and success: Deborah Riegel ’93, a Law Firm Challenge representative and her father, Arthur Riegel ’94, who share an alma mater and

PAY IT FORWARD

Giving Back Paves the Road to the Future

By **Andrea Strong ’94** and **David Potocki**

a commitment to give back to the school; Debra Humphreys ’84, who has spent much of her life creating educational opportunities in her home city of Joplin, Missouri, while unwavering in her longtime support of the Law School, including the recent purchase of a Moot Court seat; Lawrence Sucharow ’75, who has endowed two scholarships, the Labaton Sucharow Scholarship and most recently, the Larry and Fran Sucharow Scholarship; and the Altman family, which sent three generations to BLS and named a residence hall apartment in memory of its patriarch, David Altman ’25.

We also introduce our new Director of Development, Jean Smith, who comes to the Law School with over 20 years’ strategic development experience with nonprofit organizations and educational institutions, both in the U.S. and abroad. “I can’t thank our supporters enough,” said Smith. “The achievements featured in this magazine would not be possible without them.”

“We have ambitious goals for the future of BLS,” said President Joan G. Wexler. “With the strong support of our alumni and friends, who share the same passion for our great institution that is demonstrated in these four stories, we can continue to provide a first-class education for our students.”

Deborah Riegel '93 was a second-year student at Brooklyn Law School when her father, the principal of P.S. 107 in the Bronx, did something rather unexpected: he enrolled at BLS. One day they were a father and a daughter, the next, classmates.

For Deborah, who is now a senior partner in the litigation group at Rosenberg & Estis, the situation demanded some ground rules. "The main rule was non-interference," she recalled. "I told my dad, 'When we're in school, you are my classmate and not my father, so if I'm sitting in the back of the classroom reading my book, I don't want to hear about it.'" But Arthur demanded something in return. "I said, 'fine, I'll follow your rules, but you have to give me your outlines!'" A deal was made, and so two generations of Riegels became classmates—and, along the way, true friends.

"There was a leveling of the relationship, because she was much more knowledgeable than I was," said Arthur. "It helped to create a more adult relationship between us. It was also rather humbling to have professors who'd taught Deborah compare me rather unfavorably to her. I remember Jerry Leitner saying, 'How come you can't keep up with your daughter?'"

Arthur may have been a little slower than his daughter to understand torts rules, but he came to the Law School with 20 years of experience as a principal. He had long entertained the idea of a career in the law, but couldn't do so while raising a family. When he was offered a retirement incentive in 1991, he jumped at the chance to go to law school. "For many years, I had a stack of collective bargaining agreements on my desk that I was expected to implement and abide by, and it really led to a degree of fascination with collective bargaining."

Not surprisingly, given his background, he has since developed a thriving career as an arbitrator of labor-management disputes. He is a permanent arbitration panel member for some 20 labor organizations, including the NYC Department of Education, Con Edison, and the Metropolitan Transit Authority. "This was a field that I knew well. As a principal, I was mediating all day long. But when anyone asks me a legal question, I say 'talk to my daughter.'"

Indeed, Deborah has also enjoyed her share of success, but as a skilled litigator, not a neutral party. "I think I got my initial litigation skills from years of defending myself at home," she recalled. "There were always lively discussions in my house. My father is not averse to taking positions that he doesn't necessarily believe in simply to make people's blood boil."

Deborah joined Rosenberg & Estis shortly after graduating and has become a star trial partner, representing clients, in both state and federal court, in residential and commercial real estate litigation, including matters related to rent regulation, cooperative and condominium issues, construction disputes, and contract and tort actions. She also works with clients on assemblage and development issues, leasing, and construction management.



Deborah Riegel '93 and Arthur Riegel '94 *Family Ties*

Together with Gary Rosenberg '74, Deborah is also a Rosenberg & Estis' representative for the Law Firm Challenge, which aims to reconnect alumni to their alma mater by fostering a community among law firms while promoting support for the Law School. "I feel so strongly about giving back," she said. "It's nice to encourage people to get involved or to become even more involved. For me, law school was an extremely positive academic experience. The faculty was fabulous, and I enjoyed my classmates. There was nothing about it that didn't resonate and help me grow. I believe in large part that I am where I am because of the foundation I got at the Law School."

A little over a decade has passed since Deborah and Arthur graduated, but one moment between the two of them remains strong. "What was truly memorable for me was to walk onstage at Lincoln Center at commencement and have my daughter give me my degree. Chief Judge Judith Kaye, who was the honorary speaker that year, walked to the front of the stage to greet me. It's a moment I will never forget."

"It was a very special day for me, too," said Deborah, "The funny thing is that the first time I met Chief Judge Kaye after graduation, I went over to introduce myself and she knew who I was. 'I don't know if you remember me,' I said, when she immediately responded, 'Of course I do. How is your father?' and then proceeded to relate to me how special she thought his graduation was." Seventeen years later, Deborah and Arthur agree.