

A NEW CHAPTER: FINDING PURPOSE BEYOND THE PRACTICE OF LAW

I spent more than 30 years as a criminal defense lawyer, in both the public and private sectors. It was challenging, intellectually stimulating, heartbreaking, and stressful. As my children began to grow up and leave the nest, I found myself wondering what was next for me. I was too young to retire, but I was ready for a change. My sister had enjoyed a long and rewarding career as a public librarian, and I found myself thinking more and more about spending the remainder of my working years in the quiet, peaceful setting of a library, helping people find books and answering their research questions, rather than negotiating plea deals, arguing motions, and visiting clients at the jail.



In March 2024, I applied to and was accepted to the University of South Florida MLIS program. My plan was to graduate when my youngest daughter graduated from college and to become a public librarian. I decided I would gladly take a pay cut to escape the stress of court deadlines, arguments with opposing counsel, and clients facing prison time. I eagerly enrolled in my first two library courses.

While looking at librarian jobs one day, I saw that the newly accredited Jacksonville University (JU) College of Law was hiring a law librarian. This option had truly never occurred to me. JU was looking for someone with both a JD and an MLIS, so I tucked it away as a possibility for the future—after I earned the additional degree. Still, on a whim, I called a friend who was a dean at the law school. She kindly connected me with the law library director. They were both supportive and encouraging, but ultimately explained that they needed someone with both degrees. I completely understood. Honestly, I was not ready anyway. My daughter still had three years of college ahead of her, and I had a full caseload with many clients depending on me.

And then...they called me back. They were unable to find the right fit for the job. If I was interested, they were willing to amend the job description to require a JD and enrollment in an MLIS program, and to make it a staff rather than a faculty position, with slightly lower pay. They were also hoping I would teach, which sounded amazing! (I have since learned that many law librarians teach, but I was clueless at the time).

To make a long story short, I took the leap. It has been almost one year since I gave notice at my law firm, and 10 months since I began working as a law librarian. During that time, I have been humbled to learn how much I have to learn. Yet, I do not regret my decision for a minute. My favorite part of every day is interacting with the law students—answering their questions, sponsoring the Criminal Law Society, helping plan a mental health and wellness week, and teaching a one-week experiential learning class in January. All of these experiences have been rewarding and fun!

Now, as summer approaches, I am looking forward to our law school's first graduation, attending the Teaching the Teachers Bootcamp in May, the [AALL Annual Meeting & Conference](#) and the [Conference of Newer Law Librarians \(CONELL\)](#) in July, and teaching a full semester of Advanced Legal Research and Writing in the fall. I feel that being a law librarian was the job I was meant to have, and I only wish it had not taken me so long to get here!

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