

My childhood was extraordinary. I knew from the beginning that there was something special about it, about me. I had something, an experience, that I could share with a select few. I was one of only one hundred and thirty five thousand children adopted annually in the United States. Even then, I was still one of the lucky ones. I was picked, chosen, welcomed into the most wonderful family before I was even twenty-four hours old. I had the greatest luxuries one could ever imagine: a roof over my head, food on the table, clothes on my back, and family and friends who loved me beyond a shadow of a doubt. I was wanted, I was beloved, and I was cared for and protected.

My story is indeed extraordinary. In 2017 alone, an estimated six hundred and seventy four thousand children were determined to be victims of maltreatment, including neglect and physical and sexual abuse. In most instances, the abuser was someone close to the family or even a family member. Shockingly, that is a decrease in the number of victims from 2016, the year I first heard about the national crisis affecting our children and ultimately our future.

Before I was aware of the severity and frequency of child abuse and neglect, I had an interest in law but no clear direction. However, upon hearing those heartbreaking statistics, I knew I had to take action, and it was then, as a freshman in college, that I made the decision to actively pursue the study and practice of law. From then on, I devoted myself to my studies, both within and beyond the classroom, to ensure I was as well-prepared as I could be. Through my experiences, my passion and purpose became all the more clear: I desired to advocate on behalf of children in difficult and often harmful home situations with the vision of reconciling and restoring broken families, communities, and institutions.

Personal Statement

And yet, I found myself asking - no, consumed by - the same pointed question: who am I to say that I want to empower or embolden individuals who had been victims of child abuse or neglect in a court of law when I myself cannot even begin to fathom or understand the trauma they have, or even still are, experiencing? As I wrestled with this question for months on end, I slowly began to have a better idea one rainy Thursday morning this past November.

While interning at my local Child Safety Center this past semester, I had the opportunity to go to court with our Child Advocate. We were sitting together in a waiting room with a sweet seven-year old girl whom I will call Kate. Kate was at the courthouse, prepared to look her offender, accused of sexually abusing her, straight in the eye and not only recount but reenact in open court what he did to her. After about twenty minutes of us just sitting, waiting, her team of attorneys walked in, tears gently gliding down their faces. A woman, who I later found out was her aunt and caregiver at the time, bends down and says: "Sweetie, you did it. Because you were here and ready to speak out against him, he admitted what he did to you, and you no longer have to face him ever again. He will be locked up for a long, long time, and you are free to go." What happened next I will never forget.

Sweet Kate, ever so calm and collected, just smiled and said, "So that means I can go back to school and to recess? We are playing Piggly Wiggly today, and I am really excited." Even if it were for but a few hours, Kate was free to be a carefree seven-year old, something she probably had not had the opportunity to be in a very long time. In that moment I realized what it meant to me to devote my life to being a family lawyer; I realized that, for me, a life well-lived is one in which my labors are directed toward helping every abused and neglected seven-year old simply get back to school in time for recess.