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Passion for righting wrongs runs deep



PERSONAL INJURY
 By Anne-Marie Sweeney
 Special to AdvocateDaily.com

It was a Grade 5 incident that ignited **Stacey Stevens'** desire to become a lawyer.

"One of my friends got into trouble for something she didn't do and I just felt this urge that I needed to take up the cause and defend her," she tells AdvocateDaily.com.

Today, Stevens is still passionate about righting wrongs. But, although she knew what her calling was at a very young age, it wasn't easy getting to the lawyering part. Step after step, it seemed there was always an obstacle in the way, she says from her office at **Thomson Rogers**, where she is a partner.

While she was called to the bar in 2005, Stevens' legal work spans almost two decades.

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Stevens learned very early on that nothing worth having is easy to attain. With minimal support systems in place, she completed her high school education and worked part-time jobs in order to meet her financial needs.

Unfortunately, going to law school was simply out of the question. Rather than let that stop her, Stevens started working as a receptionist at a law firm and enrolled in a two-year night school program offered by the Institute of Law Clerks of Ontario. She graduated with honours and went on to work as a litigation law clerk in the public and private sector for a number of years.

But, that long-held desire to make a difference in people's lives was still burning deep inside and it couldn't be ignored. In her spare time, Stevens lobbied the provincial/municipal government to build the first non-profit co-operative housing complex in Pickering. She also started a Breakfast for Learning program at her childrens' school; a program that continues to operate today.

Stevens continued to work as a law clerk, but her sights were still set on law school. After years of working for various lawyers, Stevens competed for a spot in the federal government's self-employment assistance program. She successfully pitched a business plan to government officials, and started her own company geared toward serving law firms north of Highway 7 that didn't have enough files to support a full-time law clerk.

Through the business, Stevens met plaintiff's personal injury lawyer John McCarthy –now a Superior Court Justice –and worked for him for almost three years. He encouraged her to make the leap and apply to law school.

In September 2001, she was accepted to law school at Osgoode, at York University. It wouldn't be easy for Stevens, now a mother of two boys, but her passion for law flourished. While in school, she spent two summers with Oatley Vigmond before taking an articling position at the firm. She then worked with McLeish Orlando LLP after being called to the bar.

Now a Partner with Thomson Rogers, Stevens has the unique experience that comes from working at all three of the high-ranking Canadian firms involved in the prestigious Personal Injury Alliance, which goal is to provide unparalleled legal representation to people who have been seriously injured in accidents and their families.

When she looks back at her start in the legal profession, Stevens says it's difficult to put into words the reasons she wanted to become a lawyer.

"My years of hardship and struggle showed me what it is like to be disadvantaged and taught me how to overcome what seemed like insurmountable challenges," she says. "I know what it's like to believe you are helpless and have no control over your circumstances."

Stevens draws on her past experiences to identify with her clients, as she works with them so they can return to the lives they once had. This is reflected in her relationship with clients like LeeAnn Cayer, who says Stevens went beyond the legalities of her matter and paid great attention to her pre-accident lifestyle and current needs.

"I always felt looked after but there was also a greater feeling of being cared about," says Cayer. "Stacey was incredibly responsive to any concerns and questions from myself and my family. Without her representation and support I would not have the quality of life I do today."

The journey Stevens faced to get to where she is today was not easy, but when asked if she would do it again – without hesitation, she says yes.


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