



Liam Montgomery: President of Virginia Law Families, University of Virginia School of Law, Charlottesville, VA

[By Mary Waldron]

When he was admitted to the University of Virginia School of Law in 2005, Liam Montgomery, current 2L, husband, and father of two, was a newcomer to Charlottesville looking to start a new career and life with his family. While searching for advice and helpful recommendations, Montgomery received an overwhelming response when he met the Virginia Law Families group, whose members immediately reached out to him and his family. Today, Montgomery is president of this group, leading and promoting advocacy for law students with families, as well as support networks for law families who are new to the community or seeking comradeship.

After dedicating 11 years to the U.S. Navy as a pilot, Montgomery decided it was time to pursue a more family-time-friendly profession that would utilize the set of tools he acquired from his time in the Navy. During his naval career, Montgomery learned about some of the most basic elements of practicing law—quick thinking, public speaking, and making arguments—so it was no surprise that he was inspired to become a lawyer.

When Montgomery attended a school-wide activities fair at the start of his law school career, he was looking to buy a home near the law school and wanted some opinions on what areas would be best for raising a family. After seeking help from his newfound friends at Virginia Law Families, he received 20 responses to his inquiry, which assured him that the University of Virginia really did respect and promote law students who have families.

Virginia Law Families works toward the advancement and well-being of students who battle the challenge of balancing a demanding law school career with a happy and healthy family life. The group typically lobbies for issues such as parking support for families, childcare, and high chairs for the school dining hall. Soon after Montgomery was elected president, he reached an agreement with the school that established a designated campus room for nursing law school mothers. The other aim of Virginia Law Families is to create a

support system of friends and law colleagues who know what it is like to push through the drudgery of law school while raising a family. In pursuing this goal, the group sponsors low-cost family events like potluck dinners, bagel breakfasts, and apple-picking outings. It also hosts a weekly playgroup for spouses of students and their children. Montgomery's wife, Tracy, an at-home mother, hosts the playgroup with their two children, Colin, who is three-and-a-half years old, and Claire, who is two. Through these experiences, law students and their families have become close friends and mentors to one another.

Montgomery has begun to merge his legal education with his legal career ambitions. Working with some of the best litigators at Womble, Carlyle, Sandridge & Rice, PLLC, in Tysons Corner, VA, Montgomery was able to exercise his legal research and practice skills. This summer, Montgomery will cross the United States, as he is planning to intern in Washington, DC, at Williams & Connolly, as well as at Lane Powell in Seattle, WA.

To date, Montgomery is not 100% sure about what type of law he wants to go into once he graduates, but he is sure of one thing: he is learning a huge amount of fascinating and important information. "Having come from a long career, I treat law school like a job," he said. His enthusiasm for the material lies primarily within the boundaries of criminal investigation, especially when it

relates to issues such as the government's rights to search private homes and vehicles and Miranda rights. Although Montgomery has not completely narrowed down his career focus, he does know that he wants to be a litigator. He also hopes to do some pro bono work for child advocacy in the future.

The most valuable teaching tools during law school are not only the textbooks and the mock trials but also the lessons and advice gathered from genuine law professionals and faculty who work to guide law students in the right directions during and after law school. Montgomery has had the pleasure of developing several strong relationships with law faculty members, all of whom have influenced him in ways that go beyond the material covered in class.

Brandon Garrett, who became a mentor to Montgomery during his first year at Virginia Law, currently teaches civil rights litigation and constantly provides Montgomery with priceless advice on classes and careers in law. He also will be Montgomery's faculty advisor for "The Note," a major research paper that Montgomery must complete as a member of the school's law review, for which he serves as an editor. Anne Coughlin, Montgomery's criminal investigation professor, has also been an invaluable source of advice and encouragement. "She is truly one of the finest, most enthusiastic, and sincere professors I have ever met. Her level of concern for her students is second to none,"



he said. Ruthie Buck, a professor he had in his first year, taught him an immense amount about legal research and writing and ended up being another great mentor for him.

Montgomery's dedication to both his family and his career is an inspiration to all law students and professionals, suggesting that,

with enough determination and encouraging support, you can do anything you have a passion for—even when you have a wife and two children depending on you. Embarking on a major career change after 11 years in the U.S. Navy is a difficult task, but Montgomery has taken on the challenge, beating out all of the odds.

ON THE NET

University of Virginia School of Law
www.law.virginia.edu/html/index.htm

Virginia Law Families
www.student.virginia.edu/~lawfams

Womble, Carlyle, Sandridge & Rice, PLLC
www.wcsr.com