



## Nicholas Pennington: 1L at Drexel University College of Law, Philadelphia, PA

[By Rebecca Unzicker]

Growing up in the rural East Tennessee community of Clax Gap, Nicholas Pennington did not receive much encouragement to obtain an education beyond high school. In fact, he reported that his high school guidance counselor responded to his dreams by asking him if he thought he was too good to stay in Clax Gap and “get a job like everybody else.”

Heartened by his parents’ support, he was the first in his family to have the opportunity to attend college. Now a 1L at Drexel University College of Law, Pennington hopes to become an Assistant District Attorney in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

Although he has wanted to become a lawyer since childhood, Pennington’s road to law school has not been an easy one. He quickly fell behind in his freshman year of college and was eventually diagnosed with a learning disorder. After learning strategies and techniques to overcome his dyslexia, Pennington got back on the road to college success, but he had left a shattered academic record behind him.

“At first I was destroyed. I was so embarrassed,” Pennington said.

With help from his school’s educational-assistance department, Pennington learned to work around his disability and finally achieved a near-perfect grade point average.

“Unfortunately, this came a bit too late, as the damage was done,” Pennington said. “I knew that there was little hope of being accepted to law school.”

Determined and hardworking, Pennington eventually turned his talents to the hospitality industry and earned a master’s degree from the University of Tennessee in hospitality,

recreation, and tourism management. He soon captured a plum position with a team slated to open the new Ritz-Carlton Hotel in New York City in September 2001.

As he prepared to take the train across the Hudson River early in the morning on September 11, 2001, Pennington’s father called to give him the news that the World Trade Center had been attacked. After the initial confusion and once he had determined that his new coworkers six blocks from

ground zero were safe, Pennington soon realized he was out of a job. The hotel delayed its opening, and Pennington’s position was eliminated.

“From that time on, I bounced around from various family members searching for jobs where there were none in the aftermath of the attacks,” Pennington said. “I was faced with a bleak job market, as the tourism market had come to a screeching halt.”

Pennington’s relentlessness, which he learned in part from his father, resulted in his eventually excelling in the Manhattan hotel industry in the next few years. But the lure of the law never really left him alone.

“While I did love hospitality, I still had a yearning to go to law school,” Pennington said. “I knew that if I was ever going to do it, then it had to be now.”

Drawing on what he had learned from his role model, his father, Pennington believed that hard work and unyielding pursuit would lead to success.

“I have to admit that my father is my role model,” Pennington said. “He came from nothing and through much adversity to be able to raise a family and provide much support for me throughout my life. I have witnessed his excellent work ethic and relentless drive my entire life, and he has been an amazing example.”

**Q. What do you do for fun?**

A. Fun? During law school? Seriously, I was on crew in college and have enjoyed getting back into rowing, as Philly is a great place for the sport. I also try to spend time with my wife, Meaghan, and dog, Gracie, every chance that I get!

**Q. What CD is in your CD player right now?**

A. I haven’t used a CD player in a while since I discovered the iPod. I usually use the iPod for running, so most of the songs are things that keep me motivated, which is a wide variety. You may find anything from Dolly Parton to The Killers.

**Q. What is the last magazine you read?**

A. Leisure reading seems to be a thing of the past, but I think I was checking out *Travel and Leisure*. I still like to keep an eye on the hotel world.

**Q. What is your favorite TV show?**

A. *The Price is Right*.



"I knew that my undergraduate GPA would be a hindrance, but I hoped that there would be some school out there that would see past that and offer me an acceptance," he added.

Now in the top 10% of his class at Drexel, Pennington said the skills of attention to detail, diligence, and discretion that he learned working in some of the world's greatest hotels will serve him well in

practicing law. Trained to be detail-oriented in the hotel business, Pennington said he now looks for the little details in every case or statute, hoping to find a detail that someone else has missed.

Planning to practice criminal law in Philadelphia, Pennington believes this area of law allows lawyers to make the most significant impact on the community.

"I hope to make an impact on the Philadelphia community," Pennington said. "Specifically, I want to make an impact for regular people rather than corporations."

Pennington has traveled a long road from the hills of East Tennessee but said he wouldn't change one step of the journey.

"I have learned a great deal about myself and the world around me," he said. "While the side steps here and there may have made me a bit older than the rest of my classmates, I am lucky to have the life experiences that I gained along the way."

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