



Debbie Palomino, Legal Secretary at Hinkle Elkouri

[By Douglas May]

Born in Ft. Thomas, Kentucky, Debbie Palomino grew up in a town called Arvada, a suburb of Denver, Colorado. Arvada, a serene western suburb with an estimated population of 107,000, mixes a pleasant hometown feel with a diverse business community. Proximity to the mountains gives Arvada a recreational flavor, and Palomino says that she greatly enjoyed going to the mountains and skiing in her youth.

After graduation from high school, Palomino attended one year of junior college, but then had to work full-time. She worked for a national retail drug store and says that she “has been exposed to a wide variety of learning experiences through my association as a board member of local and state United States Youth Soccer organizations, my employment with a large national retail drug store company, and attendance at workshops through my husband’s employment.” She adds that her primary job during this time was raising her son and making sure he was on the right track in school, and her efforts certainly proved successful as he is currently a second-year family medicine resident at Wesley Medical Center.

Palomino says that once she knew that her son was well on his way to a stable career, it was time for her to decide “what I want to be when I grow up.” She says that she knew that it would involve working in an office environment. She comments, “At first, I considered an opportunity as an administrative assistant. However, I’ve always been interested in law. A local attorney who provided temp workers to law offices offered a legal secretary course in the evenings once per week for six weeks as an introduction to the field. This gave me a view of the legal world which truly sparked my interest. A friend of mine was acquainted with our firm’s former chief operating officer, and she suggested I contact him. After an interview with the COO, in order to get my foot in the door since there were no legal secretary positions open, I was hired as a part-time courier. Within several months my abilities were recognized, and when a legal secretary position opened up to work for one of the members, the COO suggested he give me an opportunity.”

Palomino states that her personality and the different skills she acquired in her previous jobs and experiences with various organizations are befitting for the requirements of her job as a legal secretary. She says that there are many benefits to working in a legal environment and that she enjoys the respect of her peers, the respect of the attorneys she works for, and the satisfaction she finds in the work that she does.

“It is an exciting field to be in, and there is always something new to learn.” She says that she feels that she will continue on in the legal field, and her goal is to increase her skill level and knowledge in order to be an even greater asset to the firm. “I have been in the legal field for a relatively short time and had a steep learning curve to get started. I enjoy being very dedicated at whatever I am doing!”

Q. What do you do for fun?

A. A great day would be to go for a motorcycle ride with my husband and then dinner with friends.

Q. What CD is in your CD player right now, or what is the last song you listened to?

A. Phil Collins.

Q. What’s the last magazine you read?

A. *National Geographic*.

Q. What’s your favorite TV show/movie?

A. *Dances with Wolves*.

Q. Who is your role model? Why?

A. My husband is the source of my happiness, and a good person. Because of his background and what he has accomplished in his life without [the] benefit of a college degree, I know that anything is possible with hard work and perseverance. He emigrated from Ecuador to the Kansas City area when he was 14 and did not even speak English. He is currently Director of Operations for a fast food company that he grew from two to over 70 stores, and I have nothing but admiration for what he has accomplished. His influence gave me the courage to tackle a major career change at a later stage of my working life.

A great influence on Palomino’s life has been her husband. She maintains that his support through her adult working life has allowed her to be the person she is today. She also credits her father and mother with being “a guiding force in hard work and dedication.” Her current boss, Mitchell Herren, has been her most influential mentor, contributing significantly to her success in her profession. Palomino says, “The working environment he provides is conducive to personal achievement and satisfaction with the job.”

Palomino has now worked as a legal secretary at Hinkle Elkouri Law Firm LLC for five years. The firm is located in Wichita, Kansas, and, according to its website, “has developed a regional and national presence...while serving a diverse client base with our solid advice and legal counsel. As a law firm representing clients throughout the Midwest and the nation, Hinkle Elkouri maintains a team of more than 40 attorneys along with a support staff of about 70 — including a number of full-time legal assistants and accountants.”

As far as giving advice for her peers in the legal field, Palomino advises, “Join local legal professional groups and network with others. In addition, I found that studying for and achieving certification through NALS, a national association for legal professionals, was very beneficial.”