



Profile: Aurora Josephson

[by Regan Morris]

Paralegal, accountant, janitor, staff artist, secretary: working as a paralegal for the small nonprofit company Lawyers For One America means Aurora Josephson wears many hats. LawCrossing talks with the artist and trained opera singer about her role at the nonprofit and her thoughts on attending law school.

When a nonprofit like Lawyers For One America needs its website updated, there's no money to hire a webmaster or graphic designer. Same goes for minor repairs in the office, general accounting, and secretarial work. Aurora Josephson does it all.

Ms. Josephson, 30, worked as an assistant to Teveia Barnes (see this week's attorney profile) at the Bar Association of San Francisco. When Ms. Barnes started the new Lawyers For One America office in April 2003, Ms. Josephson went with her.

Lawyers For One America promotes diversity in the legal profession and provides pro bono legal services to the working poor. Ms. Josephson, a printmaker and opera singer by training, was initially drawn to the law because of its nonprofit opportunities. Initially it was a way to make money because her singing wasn't bringing in the big bucks. Now she is considering going to law school.

She said her artistic training has helped her run the Lawyers For One America office. Ms. Josephson and Ms. Barnes are the organization's only staff. Others volunteer their time to the organization.

"I'm her legal secretary, assistant...I am the office manager and I update the website and do the QuickBooks, the accounting work, so I do like a lot of the back-office work," she said. "A lot of accountants are also musicians. It was really easy for me to learn about the numbers and make that transition. Music is a numeric language also."

Ms. Josephson said learning the various software necessary to update the organization's website and keep the accounts, like QuickBooks, was like learning another language.

"And once you know one of these programs, it's pretty easy to kind of get tutored in another one, it's like the Romance languages," she said, meaning once you know Spanish, it's not so hard to learn French or Italian.

Most of her paralegal training has been conducted on the job, but Ms. Josephson has taken some paralegal courses on the side. Her first job out of college was for Planned Parenthood, and she has been drawn to the nonprofit sector since that experience.

She still performs as a singer, and her artwork is displayed on her website: www.aurorarising.com. But Ms. Josephson said performing is now her "second job." She's an improviser, and her performance work stems from free jazz.

"It's hard to make money on your art, around here especially," she said. She said Ms. Barnes' passion for the law was infectious and that her aunt, who is an attorney with the Bureau for Land Management, has been encouraging her to go to law school.

"So I've had some strong influences that have kind of led me to the law," she said. "I have to say having role models and mentors really has led me to an appreciation for the law."

Lawyers For One America provides pro bono

services and operates on contributions and money from grants. The budget is tight, which means Ms. Josephson is frugal. Working in a tiny, nonprofit office, you have to be a problem solver, she said.

"You have to just step up, and when you need to do something, you have to figure out how to do it. I do a lot of research online, and I do a lot of looking for deals; we bought our conference phone on e-Bay, for example."

She also does all the intake of prospective clients.

"I make the coffee. I'm the janitor. So there's a lot of little jokes. Okay, now I'm putting on my janitorial cap; okay, now I'm putting on my accountant cap," she said. "It's fun too, because there's so much variety, and it keeps it very interesting."

Ms. Barnes does not do litigation, so Lawyers For One America does a lot of referrals to other legal service organizations if the case is not a good fit. If clients are eligible for legal aide, Ms. Josephson or Ms. Barnes sends them to legal aide.

"If they are appropriate-if they are a good case, a good match, for Teveia-I set an appointment up with her calendar," Ms. Josephson said. "I'm also a notary, so we notarize all the intakes just to make sure everyone's being honest about their income, because we are a nonprofit."

Some days, several prospective clients call. Some days, none. But Ms. Josephson said



there is always work to be done, sending out membership letters or going to the bank or post office.

Ms. Josephson has been considering going to law school for the last year.

"Of course it's a question of resources and time, you know, if you work fulltime, and finding the right match as far as the school goes," she said. "It's something I've been thinking about for a year pretty seriously. I was thinking of taking some more paralegal classes first to see if it's something I could really do, you know, to see if my personality is really suited to it. But Teveia thinks I would make a good lawyer."

In the background Teveia Barnes can be heard shouting. "I know it."