A Typical Day in the Life of Law Student

Here is a typical day in the life of a law student: 7:00 A.M. Alarm clock goes off. Hit snooze button. Go back to sleep. 7:10 A.M. Alarm clock goes off. Hit snooze button. Go back to sleep. 7:20 A.M. Alarm clock goes off. Throw alarm clock across room. Go back to sleep. 8:00 A.M. Wake up in a panic. Wonder why your alarm clock didn't go off.

Your head feels like you've been bungee-jumping with a too-long cord. Take a quick shower. Look in the mirror and wince. Feel stubble on face (if male) or legs (if female). Decide that you can make it one more day without shaving. Gingerly select some clothes from the decomposing pile on the floor and get dressed. Gulp down breakfast, which consists of a glass of orange juice and the last remaining slice of pizza from the pizza delivery order last week. Or was it last month? Try to guess whether the pizza was originally anchovy or Canadian bacon. The legal realists asserted that the law depends on what the judge ate for breakfast. What if you don't even know what you ate for breakfast?

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8:30 A.M. catch the bus that goes to the law school. Wonder why your alarm clock didn't go off. Sleep.

9:00 A.M. Contracts class. The classroom is half empty, but will fill up during the next twenty minutes. Students gradually stumble in, huddling over Styrofoam cups of coffee like zeks in a gulag. You're grateful that you don't look as bad as they do. You stroke your stubble.

Professor Frecble sets his class notes on the podium and blows the dust off. A huge cloud of dust fills the room. He then calls on a student and asks him to recite the facts of Dougherty v. Salt a classic contracts case.

In the case, Aunt Tillie said that she would take care of her eight-year-old nephew Charley. The boy's guardian accused Aunt Tillie of being all "show" and no "go." So Aunt Tillie, in a huff, signed a promissory note to pay $3,000 to Charley. Then she had the bad timing to die before she paid the debt, and the executrix of her estate refused to pay it, probably because of the minor technicality that if she did the beneficiaries of the estate would have sued her socks off.

PROFESSOR: Should the estate be liable to pay the debt?

STUDENT: Yes. Aunt Tillie made a promise, and promises should be kept.

PROFESSOR: Suppose your parents promise you some new skis for your birthday. Your birthday comes, but there are no skis. Do you sue your parents? [Laughter from class.]
STUDENT: I guess not.

PROFESSOR: You seem to have a firm grasp of the obvious. [Laughter.] Now try to engage in some straight thinking. Straight thinking is generally preferred, based on the as-14 125 N.E. 94(N.Y. 1919).

Assumption that we live in a Euclidean universe.13 [Laughter.] Aunt Tillie's promise was merely a promise to make a gift, was it not? There was no consideration.

STUDENT: What's consideration?

PROFESSOR: It will be nice to have a familiar face in class next year. [Laughter.] I will ask the questions. In law school you will teach yourself the law. If you don't teach yourself the law, then I feel guilty when I draw my paycheck. [Laughter.] Law school scratches your eyes out, and then it scratches them back in again. You arrive here with a skull full of mush, and you leave here thinking like lawyers. I'll give you another chance. In this battle of wits, it's not fair to pick on an unarmed person. [Laughter.] Cf. Euclid v. Ambler Realty Co., 272 U.S. 365 (1926) (implicitly assuming that every point on the surface of a sphere is unique). But cf. Laurence H. Tribe, The Curvature of Constitutional .Spare: What Lawyers Can Learn from Modern Physics, 103 Harv. L. Rev. 1 (1989). Cf. cannibal conventions, where people arrive with a mush full of skulls.

STUDENT [looking at his notes]: I think that consideration is the quid pro quo. It's what is given in exchange for something else. It's what makes a transaction a bargain, an economic exchange.

PROFESSOR: Oh, really?

STUDENT: And this class is definitely none of those things. I pay my tuition and I have to teach myself the law. So, according to your argument, I should get my tuition refunded.

PROFESSOR: And we thought that the hole in the ozone layer was not yet having any demonstrable effects. [Laughter.] Next time you will give a report to the class on whether executed gifts can be rescinded. Research materials may be found in the library. The rest of you (my little pretties) can read pages 73-126. [Cackle.] Class dismissed.

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What a head banger of a teacher, you think. This class is like mental slam dancing. No, it's more like playing right field in a baseball game. There are long periods of boredom, interrupted by moments of sheer terror. And only the professor knows if there even is a ball. Freeblic seems to take delight in tormenting students. You might be getting paranoid, you tell yourself. But it doesn't matter. Freeblic hates paranoids and non-paranoids alike.

10:00 A.M. Go to the library and study. Mark your casebook with multiple highlighter pens to create the illusion of being organized. Use green ink to mark the facts, blue ink to mark the law, and yellow ink to mark the interesting parts of the case. Realize that you will never run out of yellow ink.

11:00 A.M. Property class. More slash and burn. Today's subject is an ancient English case that has been irrelevant for several hundred years. The only way this information could conceivably be useful is if time travel were perfected by the time you graduated and you decided to practice law in fifteenth-century Britain.

A student volunteers to recite a case. A volunteer is like one of those birds that pick leeches out of an alligator's mouth. Because it needs the bird to perform this task, the alligator opens its mouth wide and does not harm the bird. Law professors, by contrast, gently roll students around on their tongues, lure them further inside, and then SNAP their jaws shut. Then the law professors can't figure out why after a few weeks students stop volunteering. Law professors are not as smart as their reptile cousins, alligators.

12:00 noon. Lunch. You buy a balanced lunch from the four major food groups: the Hostess Ding Dong group, the barbecue-flavored potato chip group, the Cheetos group, and the cola group. You consume them slowly to allow the carbohydrates to react chemically in synergistic ways. This is the high point of the day.

1:00 P.M. Civil Procedure. Nobody understands Civil Procedure. To make matters worse, the professor is a space cadet, only occasionally coming within the earth's gravitational pull. The musical theme from The Twilight Zone keeps running through your mind. Dee dee dee dee, dee dee dee dee.
You write on your paper:

This is your brain: O

This is your brain in Civil Procedure: o

Any questions?

One person seems to be understanding what is going on: the techno-geek sitting directly behind you. His T-shirt says "Hard Disk Cafe." He’s typing furiously on his laptop computer. It’s called a laptop because it’s supposed to sit on somebody’s lap, as opposed to where it’s really sitting, which is three inches behind your left ear. The clickety-clack of the keyboard is rapidly turning you crazy. You finally grasp the laptop and turn it around so you can read the brilliant notes he has written. You see that he has gotten to the fourth world on Super Mario Brothers III.

2:00 P.M. Go to the library to study. After much searching, you find an empty carrel and sit down. You read the graffiti on the wall next to the carrel: "Spock. I think we've beamed inside a wall." All right. You are a Trekkie yourself. The latest Star Trek movie is your favorite even though, halfway through the film, Mr. Spock has to do the Vulcan Mind Meld just to discover whether the movie has any plot. You almost gave up on Star Trek when you saw some photographs of a Star Trek convention. It was full of middle-aged people dressed in their pajamas. They looked like they still live in their parents’ basement. You separate the second and third fingers on your right hand. Live long and make megabucks.

Got to concentrate on your studies. Make a list of things to do:

- Read and brief all cases for tomorrow.
- Finish library research exercises.
- Write first draft of legal research memo.
- Outline all courses from the beginning of the semester.

What a staggering load! Just thinking about it makes you tired. You lay your head down on your open casebook. 3:00 P.M. You wake up and try to lift your head off your book. Your face is fused to the open page of your book with drool. You use your pencil to pry yourself free. You look at your watch and panic. Time for Criminal Law. You rush to class. Professor Pounder is the teacher. Robo-Prof. In his next life, he is hoping to come back as a human being. He quickly destroys a student in an act of random but efficient violence.

You wonder whether you should outline the student in body chalk.

You are gradually developing a tough exoskeleton so that nothing a professor says can hurt your feelings. "But why should be the one with the exoskeleton?" you ask yourself.

"It’s the professors who are the invertebrates." 4:00 P.M. Time for study group. The purpose of the study group is to help one another, but all you are usually able to accomplish is the rearrangement of ignorance. The study group has five other students in it, each with a unique personality. They are like the stereotypical actors in a World War II movie:Tony: The street-smart kid from Brooklyn. Before the movie is over, he will die throwing a hand grenade into a machine-gun nest of law professors.

Monica: The former university professor who decided to become a lawyer and make a living instead of having a life.

Skeeter: The big galoot straight off the farm. Because he got married in Nebraska, people threw corn instead of rice. That’s why he didn’t get married in Idaho.

Elaine: A bright student who hates law professors with a passion. She will eventually turn traitor and become one.

Wilfred: The 200-megabyte genius. He has no contact with reality. He and the others in the group have a strangely symbiotic relationship. He helps them to understand the most complex and abstract
jurisprudential aspects of the law. In return, they remind him to put his shoes on in the morning.

The study group meeting is productive. It lasts one hour, which is 2.25 hours in lawyer billable hours. The group exchanges critical information about the latest law school gossip, the cheapest restaurants in the city, and the starting salaries at the big law firms. The second half is a prolonged but ultimately successful discussion about when the next meeting will be. Well, at least you got something done.

5:00 P.M. Study for tomorrow’s classes.

8:00 P.M. Start working on your legal research memo. Outlining your courses will have to wait. After all, there’s plenty of time left. Remember your motto: “The sooner you get behind, the more time you have to catch up. Do it today!”

10:00 P.M. Catch the last bus home to your apartment. You look at the mess in your apartment. It reflects the Second Law of Thermodynamics: the entropy of the universe tends to a maximum. Your apartment is leading the way toward total chaos.

10:30 P.M. You realize that you have missed dinner, so you open the refrigerator to see what’s there. There’s half a bottle of milk, some meatloaf with hair growing on it, and a jar of horseradish. You wonder if horseradish is an effective disinfectant for meatloaf hair. You decide not.

You look in the freezer. Sticks de la fish? Nope. Too fancy. You take the milk out of the refrigerator and pour it over a bowl of Coco Puffs. You'll make sure to get a decent meal tomorrow. Also, you remember that you need to get some exercise. A while ago you went to the gym to lift weights, but the laughter made it difficult to concentrate. You study while you eat. The tenant in the apartment directly above yours starts practicing his bagpipes. Wonderful. Studies have shown that it is virtually impossible to distinguish the music of a world-class bagpipe band from the sound made by 300 cats and a blowtorch.

12:00 midnight. Time to get ready for bed. You look in the mirror and see that there is a reverse image of the page from your torts casebook printed on the side of your face. Great. NO WONDER your study group was looking at you funny.

12:15 A.M. Bed. Got to get up earlier tomorrow. You locate your alarm clock and set it for 6:00 A.M. You wonder whether it will go off.

You sleep like a baby: you snooze for an hour, wake up and cry for a while, and then snooze some more.

You have a dream in which a genie appears and grants you one wish. You ask for peace in the Middle East. The genie asks to see a map of the Middle East. He points to the map and explains that, given the location of the various countries, achieving peace in the area is impossible. He asks you to make another wish, so you wish for a happy and fulfilling law school experience. The genie pauses and asks, “Could I have another look at the map again?”

6:00 A.M. Your alarm clock goes off. You hit the snooze button.

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