





ILLUSTRATIONS BY

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# SACRED

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LAW SCHOOL has a bad reputation: hard work, endless preparation, the “Socratic method,” razor-sharp competition. Why, then, would anyone want to come to law school? Because everyone that graduates from law school is a lawyer. All of you in your various stages of commitment have decided to become lawyers. » I spent the weekend reading essays on the reasons why 27 first-year law students decided

# EXPERIENCE

*by Jane H. Wise*



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to become lawyers. Some of them knew from early on that they wanted to be a lawyer. The events of September 11th figured prominently in some soul-searching of “What do I want to do with my life?” Some were kindly and unkindly nudged by a parent, teacher, or friend.

It brought back memories of how I found myself in law school: six months from an undergraduate degree in English and theatre performance and wondering what on earth I was going to do. Graduate school? Get a “real” job? My father, an attorney (and I had no real idea what that meant), said, “Why don’t you go to law school? You love to read, you love school, you love to perform—you’re a natural.” The seed was planted, and it began to swell in my heart. It began to enlarge my soul and be delicious to me.<sup>1</sup>

I met my all-through-junior-high-and-all-through-high-school-and-all-through-the-university-departmental-English friend and announced, “I’m going to take the LSAT next week. I think I’ll go to law school.” Mind you, this was 1973, so this kind of announcement was not greatly anticipated. In 1976 I was the 100th woman admitted to the Utah State Bar. The first woman had been admitted in 1873 before the Territorial Bar, and 103 intervening years had passed before another 99 women joined her in the ranks. Today in 2002 there are more than 1,700. But in 1973 for a woman to casually announce she was going to law school was a shocking thing.

“I think I’ll go, too,” said my friend. It took about 30 seconds for her to plant the seed and for it to grow and become delicious to her. Here’s a sidelight forecast for you: when you do something very hard with a group of other people doing what you are doing so that you are all transforming yourselves together, you forge strong bonds between you. My three best friends in the world, including that junior-high/high-school/college friend, attended law school with me.

I was a theatre major. I still love passion and drama and spectacle. But what I have found and what I continue to see is that the beginnings of transforming events happen simply and quietly in the planting of a seed. That doesn’t mean that the repercussions of that seed won’t mean thunder and lightning

in the soul, but the idea usually begins in a quiet thought, the remark of a trusted friend, a new and sweet inspiration that brings light.

I’d like to share some of the stories from these first-year students telling why they decided to come to law school. You’ll find they run the gamut from the dramatic to the quiet, but all of them involve planting the seed of an idea that brings light.

One student had the idea of law school grow up with him. “I always knew that I wanted to go to law school, but from a young age people told me I should think about something else.” What is it those people knew that he didn’t know? The now first-year law student continues, “I welcome a challenge and realize that without it we cannot grow.” Another student wrote, “I can’t remember when I first formulated the idea of going to law school. It must have been formed long before concrete, cognizant thinking began, for I grew up knowing it and living it as if it was the most natural thing in the world.”

Some students thought they’d go to law school because a parent was a lawyer. One student remembers a second-grade back-to-school night when he unveiled an art project to his parents: “It was a stiff sheet of white paper that began, ‘When I grow up I want to be a lawyer.’ (The word *lawyer* was spelled out in pennies—some kind of foreshadowing?) ‘See, Dad—when I grow up, I am going to be just like you!’”

Other students had experiences that highlighted the importance of legal skills—in particular, drafting laws to protect certain segments of the population. One student wrote of working with a graduate student who was surveying migrant workers:

*The surveys were designed to see if the farmers were following safety regulations. We asked about things like notification of pesticide treatments, the availability of proper equipment, sanitary living conditions, and other safety related issues. While spending time with these workers and bearing some of their stories, I became extremely grateful for the laws that were designed to protect them. I began to see that being a lawyer had a lot of possibilities that would fit into the life I wanted to live.*

Another student was a volunteer for a Head Start program:

*I began to think about my dreams as a child and all the dreams, inspiration, and hope that education brought to me in my early years. I kept remembering an experience I had in high school where I interned at the Utah state capitol and had the chance to read over bills that were being proposed. I fell in love with the atmosphere of many men and women working together to create laws for the good of the citizens of the country, realizing that the law could be used to bring to pass good purposes and protect good people and programs. I came to the realization that good lawyers were needed to promote these causes.*

Then there were the stories of frustration with systems where rules were not obeyed that made the idea of acquiring legal skills attractive. A trip to China was the seminal event that led one student to law school. She wrote of that country's lack of adherence to rules and regulations:

*Cars did not yield the right-of-way to ambulances. Bicyclists, mopeds, and pedestrians fought to be on the sidewalk. I was pushed, shoved, and stepped on as others moved in front of me to get on a bus, to get into the subway, to pay for groceries, or to conduct banking transactions. My students at the university cheated on exams, submitted blatantly plagiarized work, and disregarded the ground rules I established and reiterated throughout the semester.*

Another student wrote of his experience as a collection agent for a rent-to-own company:

*I was looking at going into management soon; however, the merits of the rent-to-own industry were wearing thin. The majority of our customers were people who could not manage money. Many lived in trailers that were rented by the week and that did not require a deposit; however, the cumulative monthly payment was more than the rent on a nice apartment or house payment. Many individuals were in a constant cycle of drug abuse, eviction, and then temporary cleanup. Or, if a customer did stay with us, the individual would end up paying \$10,000 for a houseful of basic furniture. I asked myself, "What do I really want to do? What is important to me?" As I pondered on this, the word justice came to mind. I made up my mind to go to college and become a lawyer.*

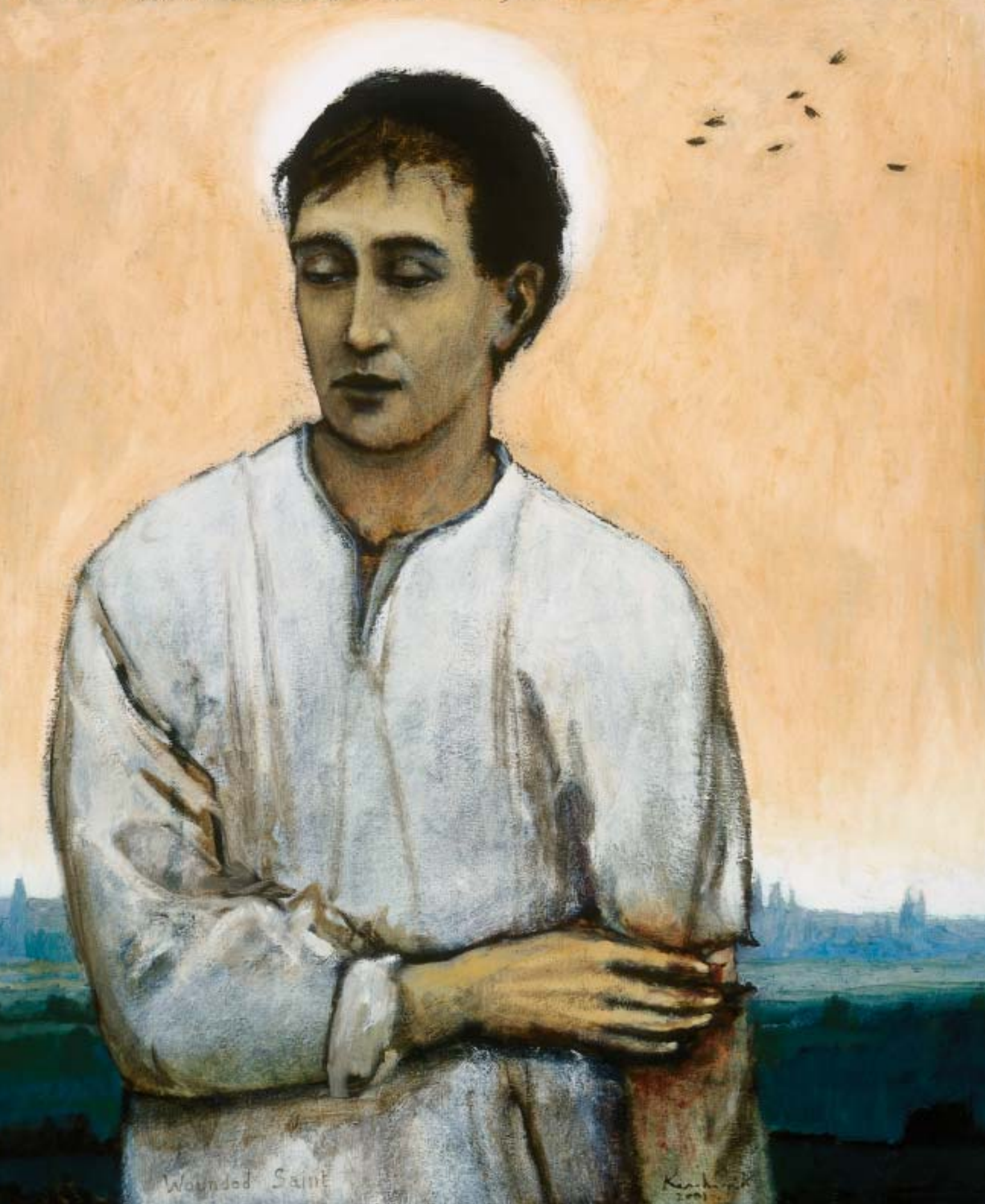
The events of September 11th figured in some of the essays as a call to self-examination and reevaluation of future plans:

THE SEED  
WAS PLANTED,  
AND IT  
BEGAN TO  
SWELL  
IN MY HEART.



IT BEGAN  
TO ENLARGE  
MY SOUL  
AND BE  
DELICIOUS  
TO ME.





Wounded Saint

Kirchhoff  
2001

*September 11, 2001, was a bad day for me. I would in no way wish to make light of how devastating that day was for others in saying that for me it was particularly bad. It bit close to home. It jarred the sense of civility that I held for my life, specifically and for my country at large, and it prompted me to scrutinize my purpose on the earth. That disastrous Tuesday was the beginning of a serious self-reflection period.*

Another student recounted a life-threatening health problem suffered by his wife coupled with the events of that day:

*The morning of September 11, 2001, I was on my way to another sales call in Crystal City, Virginia—just across an interstate highway from the Pentagon. My appointment was for 10:00 a.m., but I never made it close to the area. I was able to get turned around and make it home several hours later, where I watched the rest of the day's events unfold on television. After that, my wife and I sat down and asked ourselves what we really wanted to do with the rest of our lives. Selling software wasn't anywhere on the list, but lots of other things were, including living where we wanted to live and doing what we wanted to do.*

Many students expressed the notion that a law school education would further a life of service. One wrote, "I've always wanted to help others, and through my public education experience, I met many people who felt trapped and taken advantage of. Regardless of the type of law I eventually practice, I want to assist those who feel helpless." Another student expressed her love of children and a desire to help them: "At an early age I decided that I wanted to enter into a field where I could help protect children from the harshness sometimes found in the world." One student comes to law school because of "a desire to help people find justice, equality, and a better life" and because "the desire to be of service to others is at the core."

Finally, several students wrote about the "small and simple things" in their lives, the quiet things that were revelatory about pursuing an education in law. One student summed it up by saying, "I am in law school because of the teachings of the Church regarding personal revelation and regarding my relationship with a loving Father who

gives direction to His children concerning his will for them. Such teachings have given me the knowledge, the opportunity, and the faith to know that law school is the place where I should be."

The most extraordinary and sacred experiences in the history of the world began quietly: the birth of a baby in a stable before only a handful of witnesses although the town was packed with travelers; silent agony in a garden where the closest witnesses were asleep on the ground; crosses outside the city gate where the ordinary gruesomeness of a Roman execution brought only curious stares.

Our most sacred experiences are bound to us in quiet ways. We enter the temple to make covenants and receive promises that God will reveal Himself to us in the sanctifying of our ordinary lives: our obedience, our actions in day-to-day situations, our quiet contributions to His kingdom.

I want to emphasize that it will be the same in your law school education. In the small and simple things of your law school experience, great things will come to pass, and those things will be sacred. There was much that had to be set in motion for you to enter the doors of this school. In reading these essays I see that the motivation to attend law school came out of desires to serve, desires to live life more fully, desires for justice, and desires to make a difference in the world. That is reflected in many schools across the nation. One friend described her class at Catholic University's Law School, where many of her colleagues are former priests and nuns. These people had come face-to-face with injustice as they served humanity. They left their orders in the name of "justice" to pick up new tools on behalf of the downtrodden.

Justice is certainly one of those "great" things that will swell and grow from the small and simple things we undertake. But seeking for justice won't make the study of law sacred—and for a disciple of Christ, it should be sacred.

Section 88 of the Doctrine and Covenants was designated the "olive leaf" by Joseph Smith, "plucked from the Tree of Paradise, the Lord's message of peace to us." From verses 34 to 50, there is a discussion of law, but in verses 119 and 120, there is the sugges-

tion that in establishing a "house of learning," disciples of Christ will make the experience of learning sacred and holy because it will be done in His holy name. "That your incomings may be in the name of the Lord; that your outgoings may be in the name of the Lord; that all your salutations may be in the name of the Lord, with uplifted hands unto the Most High."<sup>2</sup>

The implications of this are enormous. To make your education sacred because it is in the name of the Lord connotes learning to be an almost priestly function. What might at first appear challenging, difficult, and an ordinary day-to-day grind is in reality sacred work.

The fact that we do this work in His holy name means that His mission becomes ours. Christ announced that mission when He read a passage of Isaiah to His fellow Nazarenes in the synagogue at the beginning of His ministry:

*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised,*

*To preach the acceptable year of the Lord.*

*And he closed the book, and he gave it again to the minister, and sat down. And the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on him.*

*And he began to say unto them, This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears.<sup>3</sup>*

His mission was and is to serve all mankind: to heal, to deliver, to set free, and to bring comfort. Ours is the same.

I pray that this law school experience will become sacred as you go about it in His holy name, and I ask for His blessings to be upon you in that same sacred name of Jesus Christ, amen.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> See Alma 32:28.

<sup>2</sup> Doctrine and Covenants 88:120.

<sup>3</sup> Luke 4:18–21.

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