

STUDENT PROFILE

Angela C. Winfield '08

When she was a child, people would ask Angela C. Winfield '08 what she wanted to be when she grew up. "A lawyer," she would answer. Not that she understood what that meant, she explains: "On the *Cosby Show*, Clair Huxtable was a lawyer, and although they never showed her working, I still wanted to be like her!"

During high school and college, Ms. Winfield tested out other possible careers. "I interned with a physical therapist, and considered psychology and psychiatry," she says. "My parents are both teachers, my sister is a teacher, and my mom has six brothers and sisters, all in the education field." Then she attended a pre-college program at Columbia. There, she recalls, "I could choose between visual art and constitutional law. I wanted to do something fun and different, so I chose visual art. But I discovered that it wasn't interesting. I switched to the law and I thought —this is for me."

Ms. Winfield went to Barnard College where, in her all-women seminars, she says, "I could participate in class. In high school, I never got to participate. I was always painfully shy growing up." At Barnard, Ms. Winfield studied political science and human rights, with a minor in religion. Her thesis was titled "One Nation Under God: Religious Freedom, the Constitution, and Democracy." In her sophomore year, after many years with an acute vision impairment, Ms. Winfield became completely blind. Her response was to talk with all her teachers to find ways to continue studying, to work as a paralegal intern for a civil rights attorney—and to spend spring semester of her junior year at Queen Mary College in London.

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"My family is a great support system," she says. "The reason why I am what I am is because of my parents. The school system wanted to put me in special education; my parents said no. I didn't know I was different until I got out into the world." Still, Ms. Winfield says, "My mom is a worrywart, and I know how strong she was to let me go. I'm really looking forward to my graduation from the Law School. I can't think of anything better to give her."

Ms. Winfield chose Cornell after applying to several other law schools. "I knew I could go to school in a large city, but I had never lived in a small rural area. I visited and really liked it. After I visited, they sent me an e-mail, and several people called." Her boyfriend lives in Auburn; however, Ms. Winfield says, he didn't want that to influence her decision about law school. "But the only one that thrilled me was Cornell," she says. "I was so excited. Then, of course, in my first year I was questioning everything! Then, and all through law school, my boyfriend has been a much needed and important source of emotional support."

At the Law School, Ms. Winfield served on the University Committee on Web Accessibility and, as a summer editor for the *Legal Information Institute Bulletin*, also worked with them on Web accessibility issues. "I used the LII before I even got into law school, and they're actually accessible," she recalls. "Electronic law information really reaches people." Web accessibility means coding Web pages so that the software used by the visually impaired can read them. "The community is trying to come up with a plan to make academic Web sites accessible. That kind of universal design, whether on Web sites or in architecture, helps everybody."

Ms. Winfield uses software called JAWS (Job Access with Speech) to convert electronic text to synthesized speech. "Everything I type is read to me," she explains. "That's the way I process everything. Braille is not efficient for me." She also has a guide dog named Ogden. "He's my first dog and he's a wonderful partner," she says. "He's my lifeline, my pet, and my tool. When I had a cane, it was rare that people would say hello. Ogden breaks the



ice." Ms. Winfield talks easily about her disability, but, she says, "I don't feel comfortable explaining all the time, only when people ask. And people see me come to class every day, taking notes, doing Moot Court and doing well at it. I can't always be the one educating, but I can teach through example." She adds that all of her professors have been very supportive. "I've been treated like a regular law student," she says.

During her time at Cornell, Ms. Winfield has been a law intern with the Cornell Legal Aid Clinic; participated with BR Legal, a student group that provides legal services to start-up businesses; and clerked with Hon. Mark H. Fandrich, the surrogate court judge and acting Supreme Court justice in Auburn. "As an advocate, you can be creative, but when you

sit in the clerk's chair, you have to figure out exactly where the law is and try to get it right," Ms. Winfield says. "It's an unusual dynamic. I couldn't be a judge, but I can take that experience to my practice with me."

Ms. Winfield has also been very active with Moot Court competitions, and served on the Moot Court Board. During her first year at the Law School, Ms. Winfield reached the quarterfinals in the Langfan Family First-year Moot Court Competition and, during her second year, reached the semifinals in the Cuccia Cup Moot Court Competition. She enjoys the courtroom because, she says, "I am a much better advocate for other people. I've always been better taking on a voice for somebody else." Following up on her talent for litigation, she served as a summer associate with Hiscock & Barclay in Syracuse and

has accepted a job with them in torts and products defense litigation. "Law is a service industry," she notes. "I'll always do pro bono work, but I don't think I could do public interest law full time. I find it very emotional. It takes a toll. Corporate clients need help, too. I'm just as passionate, but I can focus on the issues."

"I do like to argue," she admits. "Not conflict, but argument. I enjoy a challenge—and I like proving people wrong!" Considering all the people Ms. Winfield has proved wrong about her disability, her career in litigation will be a brilliant one. ■

— JUDITH PRATT