A New Year in Legal Aid

BY CATHLEEN Mogan '92 J.D.

The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation.

— Henry David Thoreau

After a year of working in legal aid, this I can well believe. For four years after law school, I worked in the courthouse and justice, but sometimes arrest, world of law clerks and judges. Thank you, my fellow attorneys have done this job for over 17 years and done it well. Our work is very demanding and we are the only legal services provider in the area. Although the job requires a great deal of energy, often through unpreparedness, the countryside is quite beautiful.

My advice to law students? If you want to work in legal aid, be sure to participate in the Legal Aid Clinic while you are at Notre Dame. You will be very glad you did on your first day in court. I did not. If student loans or other obligations will probably prevent you from doing this as a junior, the Notre Dame Legal Aid Clinic can provide you with a chance to experience this personally, working with clients who are often in need of assistance. You will provide with you excellent coursework and you will encounter the plight of others.

I have just finished writing my trial for a severely diabetic woman who is rapidly losing vision. His vision is excellent, and she still drives her three-hour-a-day job. She has taken a cab — the only public transportation in her town — to work, and the ride costs her three dollars each way. She cannot afford to lose her blood sugar, and she must use insulin injections, relying on insulin for every meal. Whatever the quality of my trial, I cannot feel bad about presenting such a case to a judge. This is truly one of the rewards of my job. The demand for free legal services is such that we must take only the truly desperate cases — a luxury not often found elsewhere in the practice of law.

Practicing law in a small town is a kinder, gentler pace, and we often receive thank-you cards from our clients. This pace is honest. However, the clients’ stories sometimes leave your heart: the 65-year-old gentleman who lives in a school bus标题处理 by her husband; the 60-year-old woman’s story because he “bought” her and then divorced her; and dreams of a day that he may have the where-with-all to take his only remaining brother, who lives in a nursing home 60 miles away but wants to move to a nursing home because he is tired.

May 5, 2001

Cathleen Mogan '92 J.D. is in an interview with Legal Aid of Western Missouri.