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A Family Affair

By Joe Sugarman

Growing up, Peter Naugle heard his fair share of debate over dinner. Both of his parents are lawyers, and his mother is a Democrat, his father a Republican. "Dinner conversation was always pretty engaging," says Naugle. "But it taught me that there were two sides to every story. In an environment like that, it was hard not to develop an affinity for debate and compromise."

Now Naugle is a third-year student at the School of Law—and is on track to be the fifth generation in his family to receive a degree from the school.

His great-great-grandfather, James McSherry "read the law" from 1861 to 1864 before going into practice and was bestowed an honorary degree by the school in 1907, just before his death. (He served as chief judge of the Court of Appeals and was the first president of the Maryland State Bar Association.) Naugle's great-grandfather, W. Clinton McSherry, graduated in 1910, and his grandfather, also James McSherry, graduated in 1948. Both of his parents, Natalie McSherry and Kip Naugle, received their law degrees from UM Carey Law in 1974.

So it was only natural that when Naugle decided to study law, he would follow in the family's footsteps, right? Surprisingly, he says, "I knew that my mother and father went, but I honestly wasn't aware of the rest of the family history until this February." He adds, "I can't say it was a conscious choice. If anything, it was in my blood."

Naugle, who attended Dickinson College as an undergraduate, spent a year working at the Maryland Volunteer Lawyers Service, a nonprofit organization that connects low-income Marylanders in need of civil legal assistance with pro bono attorneys. There, he says, he "got a glimpse at the state level at how people need lawyers and what lawyers can do for them."

Now that he's in law school and living with his mom, he admits that he often consults with her about issues pertaining to lawyering. "She's been a great resource, whether I have questions about law or law school in general," he says. "It's almost like having someone at home with office hours."

Natalie McSherry '74 with son Peter Naugle '12, her family's fifth generation at the School of Law.

Says Natalie McSherry, who specializes in commercial litigation and medical malpractice cases as a principal attorney at Kramon and Graham in Baltimore, "I love that he's studying law, but I feel like I'm reliving the stress of law school all over again. It's almost worse the second time around," she says. "It's much harder to see your son work that hard."

McSherry, who grew up in Frederick, Md., watched her father and grandfather practice law out of an office attached to their downtown rowhome. "My father loved to refer to himself as a country lawyer; he did a little bit of everything," says McSherry, one of 12 children. "People would deliver vegetables and eggs, which is frequently what he took as payment."

She says she and her siblings worked in the office as kids, searching titles and inserting pocket parts into the backs of law books. "My father would pay us a penny a pocket part, so if you did 300, you'd get three bucks!"

Of the family's dozen children, four of them went on to earn law degrees. Two of her sisters, Christine McSherry and Padraic McSherry Morton, received their degrees from UM Carey Law.

When it came time to apply to law school, Natalie McSherry says she chose the School of Law "not necessarily because my father went there, but for the obvious advantages that are still true today: It's a really good law school with affordability on its side. I told Pete the same thing: You can go to law school and come out with a big debt or go to Maryland and get the best educational value in the country."

Peter Naugle says he's more than happy with his choice—family history not withstanding. And what does he think his great-great-grandfather would say about the family legacy he began?

"I'd imagine he would be quite surprised," says Naugle. "What are the odds of having that many generations with at least one member who enjoys the study of law and has the privilege of being able to pursue it? He would also probably tell me I'm not working hard enough.

"But I would remind him that there were fewer laws back then."

(From left) Chief Judge James McSherry, W. Clinton McSherry Class of 1910, and James McSherry '48