Jolly Good... Fellows

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IF YOU HAD THE CHANCE TO CREATE YOUR DREAM JOB, WHAT WOULD IT BE? ROCK STAR? PROFESSIONAL BASEBALL PLAYER? PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES? TRAVEL WRITER? RESTAURANT CRITIC? ICE CREAM TASTE TESTER?

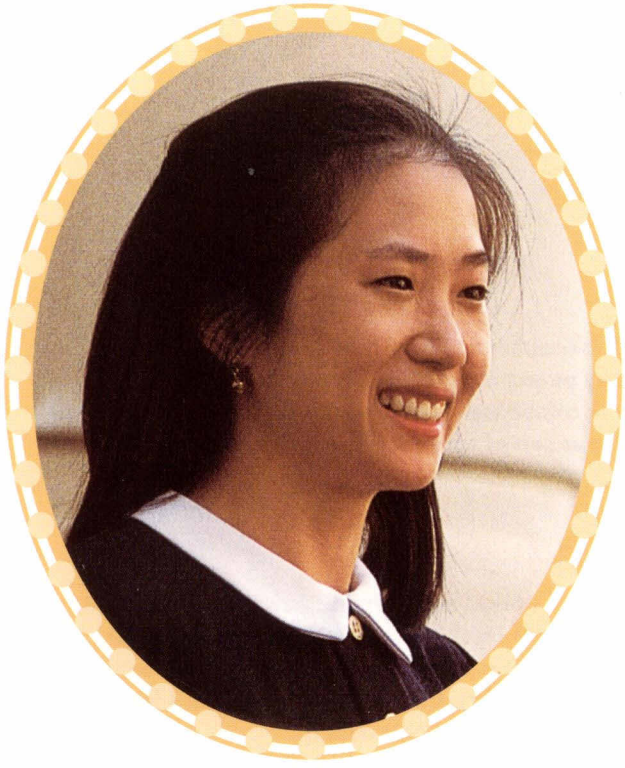
For recent graduates Luciene Parsley and Lucy Shum, who were awarded prestigious national fellowships, applying for those fellowships was, in essence, the opportunity to create their ideal jobs.

So what are those ideal jobs and where will the jobs take them?

Good friends and students of late Professor Stan Herr, who share an interest in public interest law and who earned certificates from the School of Law's Law and Health Care Program, both will begin their fellowships in the fall at the Maryland Disability Law Center (MDLC). A private nonprofit organization, MDLC ensures that people with disabilities are afforded the full rights and entitlements allowed to them by state and federal law.

Parsley, who received a fellowship from the Skadden Fellowship Foundation, will develop ways to increase low-income housing for people with disabilities in Baltimore. The Skadden Fellowship Foundation was established in 1988 by a bequest from the New York firm Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom, LLP, as an affirmation of the firm's commitment to public interest law.

Shum, who received a fellowship from Equal Justice Works,





Pictured at left: *Lucy Shum, a 2002-2003 Equal Justice Works (formerly NAPIL) fellow* ***Pictured at right:*** *Luciene Parsley, a 2002-2003 Skadden Fellow*

formerly the National Association for Public Interest Law (NAPIL), will help children with mental illness obtain community-based services through Medicaid's Early, Periodic, Screening, Diagnostic and Treatment (EPSDT) entitlement. Equal Justice Works is the country's leading organization engaged in organizing, training and supporting public service-minded law students.

Education begins at home

Parsley's interest in people with disabilities began at home. With a brother who has behavioral disabilities and a mother who has physical disabilities resulting from childhood polio, Parsley has been aware of the challenges faced by those with disabilities all of her life.

With an undergraduate degree in political science from The Johns Hopkins University and a master's degree in political management from George Washington University, Parsley always knew she would attend law school. "I wanted to learn how the law can be used to improve the lives of persons with disabilities," she explains.

During college and graduate school, Parsley worked for the defense funds of the NAACP and NOW. Also during graduate school, she worked as a house counselor for three men with mental retardation at The ARC of Howard County. After receiving her master's degree, she worked at The ARC of Maryland (formerly the Association for Retarded Citizens) as the director for community programs, a position that cemented her desire to work with the disabled. As director, she worked on systems

PHOTOS BY STEVE SPARTANA

"The fellowships recognize their visions helping members of our society whose

reform advocacy and was responsible for quality assurance, health care, education, parent advocacy, self-advocacy and prevention issues.

As a law student, Parsley was involved with the Student Health Law Organization, serving as their special events chair last year and as a reporter for a national experts meeting on genetic testing and discrimination, sponsored by the National Institutes of Health and hosted by the University of Maryland, Baltimore.

In addition to her busy life at the School of Law, Parsley and her husband, a teacher in the Baltimore Public School System, have two daughters, ages 1 and 3.

Increasing housing options

Parsley's yearlong Skadden Fellowship, which can be renewed for a second year, seeks to increase low-income housing for Baltimoreans with disabilities, without negatively impacting other vulnerable groups.

"The Maryland Disability Law Center (MDLC), my sponsoring organization, has filed a class-action lawsuit against the City of Baltimore and the Housing Authority for numerous instances of discrimination against people with disabilities," Parsley describes. "This is a longstanding problem," she continues, "and Baltimore has been involved in two voluntary compliance agreements with HUD (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development) to stop the discriminatory practices, but the problems still exist.

"Baltimore was an original demonstration site for the HOPE VI program, which seeks to tear down old high-rise public housing and build new, mixed-income housing combined with supportive services to bring people out of poverty," Parsley explains. She asserts that because of this, there is much less public housing available and she further notes that the private housing market is often inaccessible to people with disabilities.

The housing issue is further complicated by a 12-year-old racial discrimination lawsuit filed by the ACLU that resulted in settlement decrees mandating the development of non-segregated additional housing for African-American families. "That's why my project aims to develop new housing without taking away or competing for housing that is needed to compensate families as part of the ACLU lawsuit," clarifies Parsley.

An interest in social justice

Lucy Shum worked as an administrative supervisor in the Department of Psychiatry at the New England Medical Center, after receiving a master's degree in health science, focusing on mental health policy, from The Johns Hopkins University, Bloomberg School of Public Health.

Her decision to attend law school was an outgrowth of her involvement with the mental health community—she wanted to be able to advocate for individuals with mental illness.

"I have always been interested in social justice issues," Shum explains. As an undergraduate at the University of San Francisco, she volunteered at a women's shelter. During graduate school, she coordinated a School of Public Health community outreach program, and as a professional, volunteered on a project to increase the number of at-risk youth vaccinated against Hepatitis B.

As a law student, Shum's volunteer activities continued. Last year, she served as president of the Student Health Law Organization, was active in the Asian Pacific American Law Students Association, and was a member of the Maryland Public Interest Law Project.

Helping vulnerable individuals

Shum's fellowship proposal for Equal Justice Works was based on one of two projects she worked on as a Schweitzer Fellow during 2000 to 2001. The project involved "helping children obtain community-based mental health services through EPSDT. (The Schweitzer Program funds graduate-level, community-service projects in the Baltimore area, involving health,

and their commitment to voices often remain unheard."

—M. Teresa Schmiedeler

socioeconomic and legal issues.)

"Children with mental illness are among the most vulnerable individuals in our society," Shum says. "In Maryland, more than 300,000 children are eligible for services under the Medicaid EPSDT entitlement. Congress created the program to ensure that Medicaid-eligible children would receive comprehensive health care, requiring that states provide children with a full array of services," she explains. Despite the federal entitlement and funds to assist in financing, the state has not delivered the community mental health services to Medicaid-eligible children that the statute mandates, she continues. "The existing state systems function as barriers instead of providing points of entry to care," Shum asserts. "My project will facilitate processes that mobilize advocates and key stakeholders to urge the state to fulfill its obligation to children with mental illness."

A commitment to public interest

Attorney Phil Fornaci, executive director of the Maryland Disability Law Center, is excited at the prospect of having Parsley and Shum serve their fellowships at the center. "We expect that Lucy and Luciene will achieve great things for people with disabilities, working on innovative strategies to secure and expand the rights of our clients."

Securing the sponsoring organization was the easy part. The hard part, Parsley and Shum agree, was writing the proposal—"in just two pages," Parsley notes. Shum describes the proposal-writing process as "incredibly intensive and time-consuming." Both acknowledge that they had a lot of support, from family, friends, mentors, faculty, and particularly the staff in the School's Career Development Office.

M. Teresa Schmiedeler, director of judicial clerkships and public interest programs, helped Parsley and Shum through the application process, offering advice and encouragement and arranging mock interviews.

"These fellowships are wonderful ways for Luciene and Lucy to begin their careers," Schmiedeler notes. "The fellowships recognize their visions and their commitment to helping members of our society whose voices often remain unheard. Luciene's and Lucy's accomplishments also reflect well on the School of Law and underscore the School's commitment to public interest law. We hope their experiences will encourage future fellows at the law school," Schmiedeler continues.

A legacy lives on

A story on the work of Parsley and Shum could not be complete without mentioning the role that late Professor Stanley Herr played in their involvement in the disability community. Both worked closely with Herr and considered him a wonderful mentor and teacher.

"Stan strongly encouraged me to attend the University of Maryland," Shum recalls. "When I visited Maryland, Stan actually met with me to discuss my goals and academic interests and encouraged me to talk with some of his students." After Shum enrolled at the law school, "Stan provided me with a background in disability law and helped me sort out my interest in the intersection between health care law and disability law."

Parsley remembers Herr "as a quiet negotiator who got his way without creating a confrontation. He taught me a great deal about focusing on a goal and setting priorities. He took such pleasure in his work, it was contagious!" Parsley recounts that Herr took several students to the Supreme Court arguments of a case involving a man with mental retardation who had been sentenced to death, for which Herr wrote an *amicus* brief. "He chased down notable people in the court and introduced the students to them. It was such a victory when the Court stayed his execution—again."

Herr left a legacy of victories for members of the disabled community. And now two of his protégés will carry on that legacy and score some victories of their own. ■