

# Law through the Generations

The Dorseys make jurisprudence a family affair.

**K**risten Dorsey can rattle off a list of ways that she and her father, Emerson L. Dorsey, Jr., are alike. “We’re both modest, very disciplined, and have a strong work ethic,” she says. Then there’s their shared love of golf, basketball, and the Baltimore Ravens. This past May, they added another similarity when Kristen received her degree from the University of Maryland School of Law, whose alumni ranks include dad Emerson, Class of ’79 and partner in the Baltimore firm of Tydings & Rosenberg.

Kristen is the only lawyer (so far) among the four Dorsey siblings, and her

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decision to attend law school after studying journalism at Northwestern University was a surprise to Dad.

“I was shocked,” says Emerson, who serves on the board of directors of the law school’s alumni association. “It never crossed my mind that she would go to law school. I thought she would be a very good journalist with her determination and creative flair.”

Midway through Northwestern, Kristen had decided that she wanted to work more directly with people and not just write about them. “I decided to go to law school, but I didn’t know if I wanted to practice law,” she explains. “Dad didn’t steer me one way or the other [with my decision],” she says. “He knew I was going to do what I wanted to do anyway.”

This brings a chuckle from Emerson: “Stubbornness is a Dorsey trait. She gets that from me.”

Living at home in Towson while attending law school was a help to both her finances and her studies. During her

first year, Kristen, who received a scholarship to attend Maryland, sometimes turned to her father for assistance. His expertise as a business and real estate attorney came in handy with questions about contracts, and if she had questions for other classes that he couldn’t answer, he’d ask a colleague. Her studies also inspired their shared passion for a good argument around the Sunday dinner table. “I always want to prove him wrong,” Kristen admits. “I would look up a case and say ‘Dad, this is the law.’ We’re both argumentative.”

Emerson always felt he was guiding rather than tutoring. “At law school, I learned to think like a lawyer,” he says. “You have to learn to do that for yourself. If Kristen would ask a question, I’d answer it with a question. My wife would sit there fuming at me, but Kristen had to learn to look at all sides and issues. Kristen would never admit it to me, but I see her looking at different angles now.”

Attending the University of Maryland was an eye-opening experience for both. “The school is a lot different now,” says Emerson. “Some of her professors don’t use the Socratic Method, but give straight lectures. It’s an outstanding school. I couldn’t

get accepted there now.” Growing up in Frederick, Md., Emerson didn’t know any lawyers, much less any African-American lawyers. “As an African-American student, she has a tremendous amount of opportunity, more than the African-American students had when I was in law school,” says Emerson, who was president of the Black Law Student Association his third year. Kristen served as treasurer of the organization.

“Before I went to law school, I never knew what a real estate lawyer did,” says Kristen, who recently joined the public defender’s office in Orlando, Fla. “Family always came before work for my dad. He never really talked about work at home before. Since going to law school, I now know a lot more about what he has accomplished.” Pride in each other’s achievements might top their list of common traits.

“I am proud of all my children, but this is different,” Emerson says. “Kristen is the only one who went to one of my schools.” She agrees. “It feels good to have gone to the same school as my dad,” she says. “How many children can say that?”

*Sarah Achenbach writes from Baltimore.*

