Lynne Battaglia remembers her hometown of Silver Creek, N.Y., as a place where politics were dominated by men. Because most of those men were attorneys, she surmised that law school was her ticket for entry into the fascinating political world.

"I figured since I couldn’t be a man, becoming a lawyer was an opportunity to be empowered," she says. Although she knew early on that she wanted to be a lawyer, Battaglia never thought her career path would lead to the post of U.S. Attorney for the District of Maryland, an appointment made by President Bill Clinton.

"When I was in law school, I was not high on criminal law or criminal procedure," she explains. "The majority of my work was with Alice Brumbaugh in tax and estate planning." Embarking on her career with Semmes, Bowen & Semmes, Battaglia found herself more involved in litigation than estate planning. Does she ever look back on the path her career might have taken?

"Not since I’ve been the U.S. Attorney," she says laughing. "The only times I’ve ever looked back with regret are the times when I’ve not been as successful as I thought I could be."

Appointed to her current post in 1993, Battaglia strives to make a difference every day in the lives of citizens living in her district. She relates the story of a recent case in which she and her staff prosecuted a number of drug dealers who had terrorized one community for years.

"They were vicious people holding the neighborhood hostage," she notes, adding that she draws great satisfaction in seeing how the law can affect a community in a positive way. Battaglia’s district office is the only one in the country that employs a community specialist who focuses on community outreach to improve the quality of life in neighborhoods.

"That’s part of what makes me proud to be a Marylander," Battaglia says. Part of her success comes from the clarity of knowing at an early age what she wanted to achieve and pursuing her dreams in spite of challenges.

"It’s meant having a good assessment of my strengths and my not-so-strong points," she says. "Sometimes the obstacles have been defining what I wanted to do then having the capability and energy to do it."

One of her biggest inspirations comes from U.S. Senator Barbara Mikulski, a fellow trailblazer in a world typically dominated by men. Battaglia served as Mikulski’s chief of staff, supervising the work of the Washington office, two subcommittees, and six state offices in addition to acting as legal advisor.

"Barbara came from meager beginnings and became a force in an arena dominated by another gender for years. She taught me the importance of forging strong relationships and how to get things done," Battaglia explains.

Like most political appointees, Battaglia knows her current job won’t last forever. She faces a myriad of opportunities: remaining on the political path, returning to a law firm, teaching or perhaps doing something more entrepreneurial.

"I just don’t know, although I’m considering every avenue," she explains. "I do know that I’d like to be as satisfied as I am in this job right now. And this is a hard act to follow."
BY BETTY LYNNE LEARY

When a career counselor told Rachel Wohl that test results revealed her aptitude for a legal career, Wohl was shocked.

"I thought they added the scores wrong," she recalls. "I didn't want to wear a suit and I thought that lawyers just cared about making money." Dissatisfied with her career in film production, Wohl explored the legal profession by seeking advice from several Baltimore attorneys, including law school professor Mike Millemann.

"Mike Millemann persuaded me to take the leap," she explains. "He convinced me that you could be a lawyer, work for justice and have fun at the same time."

It wouldn't be the last influence Millemann had on Wohl's career. After graduating in 1988 and joining the Baltimore law firm of Venable, Baetjer and Howard, Wohl received a phone call from Millemann, who was searching for help for the Public Justice Center.

"He gathered former students who were committed to social justice and issued us a challenge, as the next generation, to create social change through the law," Wohl says. For three years, Wohl co-chaired the Public Justice Center's Domestic Violence Task Force, where she was instrumental in gaining clemency for eight battered women imprisoned for killing their abusers. Using her background in film production, she helped create an award-winning video that chronicled the stories of four of these women. The task force also changed Maryland law so that women can now present evidence of abuse along with expert testimony in court.

"Rachel was the creative, indefatigable and extraordinarily skillful leader of the commutation project," says Millemann. "Her work became the national model for a number of successful commutation projects in other states."

Taught at an early age to use her time and expertise to help others, Wohl believes it's everyone's responsibility to make this a better world. After practicing with Brown, Goldstein & Levy, a small progressive Baltimore law firm, and spending time as assistant attorney general, Wohl became director of the Maryland Family Violence Council, co-chaired by Attorney General J. Joseph Curran Jr. and Lieutenant Governor Kathleen Kennedy Townsend. The Council is implementing a plan to prevent and reduce family violence in Maryland.

Wohl now serves as executive director of the Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) Commission, an appointment made by Chief Judge Robert M. Bell. This multidisciplinary group of judges, legislators, lawyers, mediators, government officials, academics, community representatives and business professionals will build consensus for a plan and take action to advance the use of ADR both in and out of Maryland's court system.

"It's a very exciting opportunity to help make society more reasonable, peaceful and civil as opposed to feeding the combative environment we often experience," she notes.

Youngsters also benefit from Wohl's expertise; she helped start a peer mediation program at the Baltimore City public school where her son attends first grade.

"We're giving students mediation skills at an early age so they can solve their problems without resorting to violence," explains Wohl.

Wohl draws strength from the people she works with and from the people who benefit from her work.

"I'm a very fortunate person and have been blessed with extraordinary opportunities," she says. "My work is enormously satisfying and I find facilitating social change at the macro level terrifically rewarding."

Betty Lynne Leary is a freelance writer and designer living in Key West, Fla.