What does a merchant marine who has spent the past year at sea want out of life?

"I've always been a believer in justice—I was an honor board officer in my senior year at the academy, basically the prosecuting attorney at honor board hearings. I aced the rules section of the Merchant Marines License Exam, passing the entire exam the first time.

I saw a lot of things at sea that weren't right. On my first ship out to sea, the captain's orders were to turn off the radars at night—this went against all policies that I learned in the academy. I confronted the captain about my unwillingness to follow his command, saying 'If you want to stay up here all night, I'll turn them off.' He agreed to allow me to leave one on.

As a second mate on a worldwide trampers, the gyrocompass (the heart of all navigational equipment) broke and we were sailing short (without a full crew). Other crew members and I talked to the captain and told him we refused to sail. It wasn't until we wrote a letter to the Coast Guard, who grounded us until everything was fixed, that we got the captain's attention.

Laws can be written to avoid situations like these. Somebody's got to do it. It might as well be me. I want to combine my maritime background with what I learn through the environmental program and help the Chesapeake Bay, shipping, fishermen. Law school is my transition back to land life."

David Booth, a resident of Monkton, Md., played varsity football and was a member of the speech and debate team at the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy.

Patricia Young They're finally here! These five incoming students' paths have all led to the law school. What have they encountered on their travels? Have their journeys been circuitous? Have they been long? What twists and turns have steered them in this direction? What's on their maps for the future?
What's a nice, Southern gal saying about her interest in law?

"I earned the moniker the Smiling Assassin when I worked for a telecom agency in Texas. I like it because, as a Southern woman who wants to get things done, but get things done 'nicely,' the Smiling Assassin is what you have to be. Pleasant, but determined. Cooperative, but tough.

Knowing the law gives decision-makers more options to affect change. I worked in Texas state government for five years, first for the Governor's Office and then for a state telecommunications agency. Sitting through legislative hearings, board meetings, and working group sessions opened my eyes. I saw clearly how law translates into tangible items such as roads, money, and access to services. Being the first person hired by the agency gave me firsthand knowledge of what it takes to build a state agency from the ground up, including interpreting sometimes vague legislative direction. Understanding the law is a tremendous advantage if you want to work within or through government to make a difference in people's lives.

As The Smiling Assassin, I'm full of surprises. I'm interested in working at the federal level, especially at the FCC (Federal Communications Commission). State regulatory commissions interest me as well. Issues such as privacy rights, e-commerce, open access, and Internet regulation interest me. As the digital economy continues to expand, the opportunities (and necessity) for advocacy in these areas will also increase. But who knows? I may love law school so much I may want to be a law professor."

Shana Jones, who lives in Baltimore, volunteered as an English tutor for Bosnian refugees. She has a master's degree in English from the University of Virginia and is the School of Law's first Constellation Energy Group Scholar (see related story on page 2).

Why does an established, successful professional return to school?

"When my high school clustered underwent a school boundary dispute, I was shocked by how carefully the participants designed the boundary change process—disregarding any representation for the minority and disadvantaged members of the community, and orchestrating various maneuvers designed to limit this population's participation.

Upset, I lent my voice to a population of minority families whose needs and community traditions were being ignored. Working with key members of this community, we were able to obtain the board action required to thwart the opposition's grand plan. But I was shaken out of my complacency about the wonderful progress our society has made. I asked myself, 'If so much effort was directed toward a boundary change, what might be done with more serious issues revolved around the redistribution of wealth or the redesign of social service and health care delivery systems?'

An understanding of the law will be necessary to effectively advocate on behalf of minority and disadvantaged populations. I am especially interested in 501(c)(3) organizations. I would like to encourage their establishment in minority populations and communities. Following law school, I would like to run a nonprofit or, work for any entity that is a participant in the policy-setting for 501(c)(3)."

Yolanda Pruitt works full-time in the development office of the Baltimore campus of the University of Maryland. She is the first person in her family to earn a four-year degree and is now enrolled in the law school's part-time program.
What does an environmental scientist from Puerto Rico have on his mind?

"I have always been a fan of the laws and ever since seventh or eighth grade I wanted to be a lawyer. In high school I discovered some disappointing aspects of law so I decided the career was not for me. After analyzing a few careers, with my interests at heart, I decided on environmental science. Later, I studied environmental law, which combined what I love with what I know that I am good at (advocacy). I took some introductory courses in environmental law and confirmed that this was my vocation and passion.

The University of Maryland offers me the unique opportunity of studying both environmental law and policy science, in the dual-degree program, both of which are ranked among the top five in the country.

After completing the dual degrees, I would like to work in an environmental organization, preferably in the United States or Puerto Rican government. After a few years of experience, I would like to start a company focusing on South and Central America, with the purpose of improving the environment. Long term, blurry plans: become a senator. And if I do not accomplish any of this? Then, I will be poor but happy because I have already realized my dream. The rest is just toppings on the ice cream."

Jomar Maldonado has a bachelor’s degree in environmental science from the University of Puerto Rico. An Eagle Scout, Maldonado also is studying policy science at the University of Maryland College Park.

Why is a molecular biologist living in New York attending law school at night?

"With a master’s in physics and a doctorate in molecular biology, it is probably clear that I like—and am not afraid—to explore new and difficult directions in life. A few friends of mine have left scientific labs and successful careers to explore a new area—patent law. Today, as biotechnology and pharmaceutical businesses move ahead at the speed of light, there is no need to explain that patent lawyers are not only desirable, but an absolute and necessary attribute to any intellectual property firm. As for me, I did not have any doubt that the only way to satisfy my constant craving for learning and for exploring was to try myself at law.

Even after I had been accepted to the School of Law, I did not think that I would really go. A friend of mine called me more than two years ago, explaining that Kaye Scholer, LLP (a prestigious New York City law firm) was looking for a scientific advisor. I agreed to the interview, though I did not think they would seriously consider me. But they made me an offer almost right away. At that time, I had already satisfied my scientific ego; I published papers in the most prominent scientific journals in the world, Nature and Science. It was time to move ahead.

Now, after more than two years of hard and very interesting work in a patent litigation department, I am absolutely convinced that law school is the only way I want to continue my life journey and the best way to apply all my scientific experience."

Russia native Marina Lebedeva received her doctorate from the Russia Institute of Genetics. A resident of New York City, she is attending the School of Law’s evening division.