

The General Counsel, P.C. First Generation Law Student Scholarship award would facilitate another step in overcoming the social, financial, and academic obstacles I have encountered in my life in striving to accomplish my goal to become a skilled patent litigator.

My father attended The University of Texas as a transfer student from a community college in Corpus Christi. He was married at the time, but a complicated divorce led him to hitchhike to Houston, where he ultimately started a microwave and vacuum repair shop to make ends meet. He never held a professional job. Instead, he expanded his business to include major appliances such as washers, dryers, and refrigerators. When he met my mother, she and her family had recently fled from Honduras to the United States as undocumented immigrants. They married and continue to operate the family business into which I was born and raised twenty-seven years later.

Because my father's side of the family lived out of town, I grew up around my mother's side of the family. I count that as a privilege in my life because I consistently witnessed the mental resilience my aunts and uncles demonstrated by earning a living in a country with an unfamiliar language, all the while confronting the risk of deportation, which threatened the livelihood of their families. Some have suffered the consequences of the risk they incurred, but their children, my cousins, continue to press on, which motivates me to do the same in my personal life. Although my environment did not aim to prepare me for a professional career, much less one with expectations as high as that of the legal profession, I view that as a benefit, rather than a drawback, of my upbringing. Each phase of my life has amounted to an exercise in adaptability, and in adjusting to my surroundings without prior relevant experience or family history, I look to my family members who rose to meet the demands of survival in a country with which they had no ties.

Each of my Honduran uncles worked as apprentices in my father's appliance shop, and starting the day we could turn a screwdriver, my brothers and I did too. From the moment my father first situated me behind a customer's dryer to replace a vent line, armed only with an aluminum clamp and 5/16 in. nut driver, he shaped me in a way I never would have chosen to develop on my own. That isn't to say I always appreciated the gesture; what originally started as a stimulating puzzle behind mysterious machines evolved into a forced lifestyle of frustratingly inescapable manual labor. The tension this created in my life as a teenager was compounded by knowing that I wanted to pursue a college education despite the pressure to take on the family business after my father.

Because of my frequent exposure to mechanics and electronics growing up, I decided to apply to college as an electrical engineering major. I enthusiastically walked into my first college interview, ready to share why I felt compelled to study engineering and how I could contribute a unique perspective to the student body. To my dismay, I learned that I was simply not a competitive applicant. My interviewer screened my transcript and began to ask questions about my coursework. As a senior from a low-income high school, I would have completed Algebra I, Geometry, and Algebra II upon graduation, whereas competitive engineering applicants would have additionally taken Trigonometry, Pre-calculus, and two semesters of Calculus. My interviewer pointed out that regardless of my interest in engineering, I had taken significantly fewer math classes than the typical admitted student. Because my high school teachers never attended college, however, my school offered neither Pre-calculus nor Calculus.

Taking the SAT the first time further reinforced the gap between where I stood and where I wanted to be. I had not finished Algebra at the time, so I encountered several symbols, such as " $f(x)$ ," for the very first time in my life. Unsurprisingly, I performed poorly and felt devastated

after seeing my score. Despite a strong verbal score, my math score was so low that it lowered my composite score below average. I had been told I was bright my entire life, yet I stared at numbers that screamed otherwise. Some suggested that I interpret those results as a sign that I was better suited for appliance repair than college. Determined to prove otherwise, I chose to spend another year in high school and enrolled in every accelerated math class available at my local community college. I bought broken appliances from Craigslist, repaired them, and then resold them over the weekends to pay for my education. In the following academic year, I took four consecutive college math courses during the evenings and weekends. Not only did I rise to meet the math qualifications of a competitive engineering applicant, but I also earned a strong math score on my second SAT.

The thought of attending law school did not occur to me until the second year of my career. At the time, I had recently developed a business plan for implementing drones as a damage assessment tool after severe weather events. By flying a drone over damaged equipment, scouts would determine the exact nature and extent of the damage then dispatch an appropriately sized repair crew to prevent wasting the company's money, time, and resources. In attempting to streamline a repair process for field personnel, I was oblivious that I had planted the seed for a burgeoning interest in the interplay between technology and the law. Privacy-related legal concerns raised by the senior leadership team stunted any further development of my idea, and, for the first time in my career, I realized that the proverbial box I was trained to think outside of was surrounded by an even larger box, the boundaries of the law.

In a later conversation with my manager, he suggested contacting his former engineering co-worker, who eventually became a patent attorney. I called shortly after that and learned about the practice of intellectual property law for the first time. Based on conversations with multiple patent attorneys, I ultimately enrolled because I suspected—and have since confirmed—that law school would not only open the door to a more demanding career but also develop me in ways I already knew I wanted to grow as a person. Even as an engineer, I wanted to improve my ability to communicate verbally and in writing, become more comfortable thinking on my feet in front of others, and become more versatile socially by connecting with people from a broader spectrum of backgrounds. All along, though, I continued to be interested in intellectual property law because it represents the intersection between engineering technology and the law.

As a patent attorney, I can continue to broaden my technical exposure by litigating cases covering a wide array of engineering technology while sharpening my ability to communicate effectively. Given my roots in Houston, I hope to establish my career in intellectual property law in Texas, enabling me to grow as a patent attorney while remaining close to family. Although I ultimately want to practice patent litigation, prosecuting patents at the start of my career can help lay an essential foundation for making more informed, strategic decisions as a litigator. My exposure to patent law continues next summer, where I will work as a patent litigation summer associate in the Kirkland & Ellis Austin office. Ultimately, I hope to partner in the firm's intellectual property practice group.

Few men, if any, are self-made in the truest sense of the word, and I do not count myself among them. I have benefitted from the help of others at critical points in my life, and as a personal expression of gratitude, leveraged those resources for the most constructive use available to me. My life story is, in part, the product of my commitment to resourcefulness, and I am confident that General Counsel, P.C. would find, if I were awarded this scholarship, that I am equally committed to that ideal in this chapter.