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Experiencing Law

Attorneys have an immense responsibility with their clients, the community, and the law; they work on a variety of cases depending on their specialty. At Justice Law Offices the attorneys work mostly in criminal and civil cases. The role of the attorney is to defend every client in the best way possible, abiding the law in every step of the judicial process. Every attorney has the duty to do the best in each case, regardless of their personal views. During the summer of 2009, I had the pleasure of working for Justice Law Offices, under attorneys Courtney Justice, Davy Eaglesfield and Bryan Coulter. My internship was from May 19th to August 19th, 2009; during this time period I worked eight hours a day, two days a week. Throughout my internship I observed and worked on a variety of cases such as landlord/ tenant cases, criminal cases and family cases. I also worked in the administrative part of the office, answering the telephone, making appointments for clients, scheduling court hearings, closing and opening cases, and making bank deposits. Some of my other responsibilities during my internship included translating documents, interpreting for the Spanish Speaking clients, and drafting letters such as, child support letters, wills, and responses to complaints. As was the case with all of my duties at Justice Law Offices, the drafting of documents came with a great responsibility. Having the opportunity to draft these documents helped me understand the difference between writing for a professor in a class setting, and writing for an attorney. When I wrote legal documents for a class, my documents affected the professor and my grade; the potential impact was not great. However, when I was writing documents for the attorneys, my writing had greater impact because the

documents I was writing were so important, the freedom of a client and the career of the attorney were always at stake. I had to be aware of the importance of these documents, and take that into account when I was writing them.

The law field is exciting, but it requires a high level of confidentiality from every person who works at the office. Confidentiality helped to make the clients feel comfortable when they explained their problems; it also helped to keep the attorney's professionalism and work ethic from being questioned. During the first two weeks of my internship at Justice Law Offices, my days began with instructions about confidentiality; specifically how to avoid violating trust and confidentiality with the clients.

Confidentiality is important for every attorney and every employee in the office because if one of the employees violates it, the attorney can be sanctioned by The Bar Association, the organization, dedicated to regulate the professional rules and conduct of all attorneys. Therefore, if any employee violates the professional rules of conduct the attorney is penalized, and depending on the severity of the issue, the attorney could be disbarred and never allowed to practice law again. Confidentiality is also important because if a client does not trust the attorney and the employees, it is more likely that the client will find another attorney who will meet his or her expectations.

Another important aspect in law offices was to meet the deadlines in the court and between the attorneys's. Between attorneys the deadlines are more lenient because they were working to meet their parties' interests. Meeting the deadlines was vital to the law field because all court hearings were scheduled weeks and months ahead of time. If one failed to meet a deadline, the court may not be available soon enough to hear the case; this led to postpone the case and the client's stay in jail was lengthened. Not only did this

further damage the clients' life, but it also was a detriment to the attorney's reputation. In order to ensure that you met important deadlines, a good sense of time management was essential. Attorneys worked on dozens of cases at the same time; therefore, it was the paralegals responsibility to make sure that every case was monitored closely and priorities were set for each case. With such a complex schedule, I saw how some deadlines could easily be missed. However, with good time management skills and a close attention to detail, a paralegal could ensure the attorney that all deadlines were met.

The first week of my internship I attended a deposition, which is a formal interrogation with parties, attorneys, a court reporter and sometimes a judge, present. The deposition was a testimony given under oath, and could be used during trial to impeach a client who failed to answer the same way, or wanted to change his answers during the trial. I attended a deposition of a divorce case (I will call it, the Smith's case) where a large amount of money, jewelry, and properties were obtained during the marriage. Attorney Justice was representing Mr. Smith in this case. Mrs. Smith was asking to have half of the money obtained during marriage, as well as a monthly pension. However, before the marriage ended she suggested to her husband to sell some of the properties and refinance the house, in order to pay off all the credit cards and other debts that they had incurred both together and individually. While married, the Smith's did end up selling some properties and refinancing their home. However, Mrs. Smith chose to use the money they received by giving some to her mother, and purchasing a condominium and jewelry for herself and the children. According to Mr. Smith, after Mrs. Smith had used the money in the way she chose, she then filed for divorce.

Without any previous information on this case it was easy to tell that Mrs. Smith planned every move before filing for divorce. And now that the divorce had been filed, she was requesting half of what was left, but Mr. Smith was not going to let her go away with it without a fight. The case was not solved before I left, but it seemed that it was going to be in Mr. Smith's favor. I am assuming the outcome of the case based on the women's answers and contradictions during the deposition. During the deposition, Mrs. Smith's answers were vague and the attorneys incriminated her regarding the deliberate way in which she acted, prior to filing her divorce. She stated that the condominium in which she was living was her mother's, as well as all the material possessions within it. When Mrs. Smith seemed nervous or confused, I noticed that her representing attorney, Mr. Justice, would reword his questions and alternate his approach. Mr. Justice changed or made up new questions based on Mrs. Smith's responses, but also based on her body language. This observation taught me that verbal communication is not the only important aspect in a court case, but also non-verbal language; body language becomes very important. It was important to focus on body language while the client was answering questions because it can be a non-verbal cue to communicate to the attorney or the paralegal what the client was thinking and feeling, and also it served as a guide to what questions to ask next. I noticed this pattern happening often with several different clients; Mr. Justice and Mr. Coulter always shared with me their concerns and their observations after speaking to a client. Often times, during the interviews or interrogations with the clients, the attorneys wanted to make sure that I understood the strategy they were using and why they were using it. It was also important the clients understood their individual attorneys' strategies, and the specifics of how they (the client)

were going to take part in that strategy. It was also common for the attorney to coach the client on when to speak and when not to speak; this was often key to the attorney's strategy being successful. During the Smith case I saw a good example of this. At one time when Mrs. Smith referred to Mr. Smith to confirm the payments on a credit card (which she was denying to be for her personal use) Mr. Smith answered, even though he was encouraged not to. Mr. Justice was furious because, by speaking, Mr. Smith had ruined his attorney's question; now he could no longer prove that the accounts paid were exclusively in Mrs. Smith's name. In this deposition I learned the different tactics an attorney used to get the information they needed to obtain success in the case; ultimately to win a case in which there were many possibilities to win, but specific approaches needed to be taken to ensure a successful outcome.

Another deposition I witnessed during the internship was one that involved violation of human rights. This deposition was between a nurse practitioner from the State hospital and a patient from the State hospital. This case was more complex and the deposition lasted two days, of which I only attended one. The case involved claims that the nurse practitioner had forced the patient to take an unwanted medication and treatment. The case focused on two main questions; were there policies in place that allowed physicians at the State Hospital to force an objecting patient to take medications, and had there been previous knowledge or record of the physician in question having participated in similar offences. The prosecuting attorney asked about the policies in place whether a physician was allowed to force a client to take medications or treatment when a patient objected. The procedures for the policy stated that the patient had to be out of control, not capable to make his/her own decisions, and if the use of equipment

was needed to restrain the patient. Furthermore, if the restraining was performed by a nurse practitioner, a psychiatrist had to sign the order and limit the extent of restraining, on an individual patient basis. Due to the incident occurring, the director of the hospital changed some of the policies to make them stronger and clearer. The case was not solved before I left, therefore I do not know the judge's decisions. My prediction, due to the observation during the deposition, was that the client had a good case. There were various violations to this patient and the hospital was responsible for all of those because the nurse practitioner was an employee there. The nurse practitioner responded that she did not use any equipment to restrain the patient or to conduct a pap smear on the patient, but she also did not force her to take contraceptive pills; the law however, states that anything that a patient objects to, even if they later comply because they are motivated by fear, is a violation to the patient's rights. It was obvious that the restraining policy was not clear enough to the medical personnel at the State Hospital, and was poorly communicated.

This case was going to court because the nurse practitioner ignored all advices and policies required, which allow patients to deny unwanted treatments and examinations. However, the hospital claimed that the patient was laughing and joking with other patients after the incident; therefore, the incident was not as dramatic as presented to the law. The attorneys focus not whether the patient was exaggerating, but instead they emphasized the rules and policies violated at the hospital and the violation to the patient's rights. The attorneys wanted to punish the hospital for their irresponsibility to employ this person who had more likely acted the same way before, but they especially wanted the nurse practitioner to lose the privilege to practice medicine. In this case the nurse practitioner took charge of things that she was not authorized to do, this caused her

to lose her job and have a bad record. In addition, the nurse practitioner may be prohibited from practicing medicine for the rest of her life. The patient suffered humiliation that showed during the deposition; she avoided direct eye contact with people not involved in the case and kept her head down most of the time. This body language could be analyzed as distrustful, perhaps that the patient was lying, but because I am a woman I understand the shame she was feeling when her experience was being discussed, and in a way relieved.

During my time at Justice Law Offices, I had the opportunity to learn to draft a will. Wills are simple documents that can be done fast if the information given is accurate. The will I drafted was for Horacio, a Mexican client of Justice Law Offices. He had a will that was prepared for him in 2000, but between 2000 and the time of my internship, Horacio got married and he wanted to rewrite his will to include his new wife. Horacio speaks English, but still used a translator to ensure a better/accurate service to ensure that the job was done properly and in a timely manner. Horacio left me all the required documents, and after reviewing the documents, I opened his previous will to make the necessary and requested changes. When reading the old will, I noticed that the information was inaccurate; in the previous will, Horacio had requested that his brother receive fifty percent of his inheritance and that the other fifty percent be divided between his two daughters who live in the United States. However, his will stated that the inheritance was to be divided in three equal parts. The other error I noticed was with the name of the trustees; Horacio named his brother and his daughter Silvia to be the trustees, but the will named his brother as the only trustee. I notified the attorney and corrected the mistakes done in the previous will, we also notified Horacio and made sure his new will

was correctly written. When Horcaio came back to the office to sign his newly drafted will, he confirmed that all the information was correct.

These type communication problems happen when attorneys work with translators who are not fluent in both languages. This communication breakdown caused problems for the client, as well as the attorney because in the future the client would be more likely to search for a new attorney. My experience with the incorrect will was a good experience because it taught me some things I didn't previously know. For example, one thing I learned is that people who write their wills often think that once they have a will, all their properties, bank accounts, and retirement's accounts are taken care off. However, the will only covers properties and jewelry, along with other tangible valuables. Bank accounts and other types of accounts are not included, because when people open any type of account the beneficiaries are chosen and the will cannot change that. Another issue that came up in Horacio's will, as well as a will we prepared for his brother Mario, was that they wanted to include properties outside of the United States. Wills written within the United States cannot include any properties or valuables outside of this country because the law cannot impose the same rules outside of its jurisdiction; therefore, the will and its requests will not be valid in Mexico. The parenting in Mexico, and the rules that follow, give inheritance according to age and the child's behavior during the parent's life. Horacio and Mario wanted to separate their properties among their sons and daughters according to those rules; for that reason, they did not want all of the descendants to have equal shares of their inheritance.

The opportunity to draft documents for real cases was a great experience, even when I had to do it and re-do it again and again. I had drafted documents in the paralegal

courses, but it was different because now I was drafting documents to abide the rules of the court and to please the attorney's style. It was frustrating because I ask the paralegal to check the documents before I took them to the attorney, she approve them, but when I presented to the attorney, he will change things in the document and I had to redo it again. Other times I drafted a document that will please one of the attorney's but the other attorney wanted something different. Therefore, I learned that each one of them wanted things done their own way and it was not necessarily wrong, it was just a matter of style.

Most documents were redrafted to adjust to the case and the client that the attorney was working for. For example, in answering to a complaint the requesting attorney had to send a disk containing all the questions for which they want information. This was done as a rule dictated by the court, if the attorney did not comply by it, the receiving attorney complained to the court or simply returned it to the opposing attorney. The answer to the complaint I drafted was a matter of researching for the documents to get the answers and put it into the questions drafted by the opposing attorney. Some answers were directly from information given by the client, but if there were documents to answer the question, they had to be attached to the answer document. From all the documents I drafted, the answer to the complaint was the easiest because all I had to do was to answer exactly what the other side was asking for.

Every case was different, but they all required several steps that needed to be done prior to that final step in court in front of the judge. For example, another case I was involved in was a Landlord/Tenant case. In this case, the plaintiff and the defendant were friends before they got into this conflict. The landlord was asking for \$5,000 that

they loaned to the tenants for a trip to London, plus \$1,000 for damages to the house, rent owed, and money spent in veterinarian. The veterinarian expenses claimed by the landlords were because they left a dog under the tenant's care but the dog was neglected and its health was damaged during that time. Mr. Justice met with the plaintiffs, for a small claims case like this, the meeting lasted about one hour in which the attorney got all the information required to present his case to the judge. During the interview Mr. Justice decided to put Mrs. Williams, the landlord on the witness stand because she was soft spoken and calmly explained the situation, in addition, she had all the facts and dates correct. On the other hand Mr. Williams was always excited, nervous, and angry when he had to explain the facts of the case. Two other couples came to the interview to give their testimony and also willing to testify in court if necessary. In this case I learned that attorneys have to know their clients and the judge well enough to select who and what to say in court. In this case, after sitting in the interview and taking good notes about the facts, I reviewed all the information given by the clients and matched it with the documents they brought to the office.

I had to search for rent and other payments done by defendant during the two years she lived on the property and searched bank statements, utility bills paid by the Williams on that same property after the tenant moved out. There were also veterinarian bills paid by the Williams' that were caused by the negligence of the defendant who did not care for the William's dog left in their care. They were asking for the veterinarian bills because when they rented the house to the defendant, they all agreed to the terms, including caring for the dog. After finding all amounts and matching them with receipts and information they gave during the interview, I prepared a brief summary of the case

for all parties involved including one for the judge. After the hearing, the judge requested an itemized list of expenses from both sides before he made his final decision. This case that seemed simple, took organization, several steps and the preparation of various documents before and after presenting it in front of the judge. It was exciting to see how the attorneys picked their witnesses, the questions, and the information presented to the judge in court because it showed me how every detail counts when attorneys jeopardized their profession and the client's trust.

Organization and steps to get to trial are vital in every case whether the case is small and easy to solve, or a large complicated one. There was a tort (civil) case in which more than a million dollars was at risk if errors were made. This case involved a famous football player (cannot give name) and Victoria who was raped during the college years. During the criminal case the perpetrator of the rape was found not guilty, and the victim, Victoria believes that he should be at least monetarily penalized for the offence. This case was important because according to her, he was guilty but not properly punished for the criminal offence. He planned the rape because he lie to her to bring her into his room after the game, after a few minutes his friends arrived and had intercourse with her against her will.

The day before the case went to get in front of the judge to settled, I helped the attorneys to organize all the documents necessary for the confrontation with the opposing party. Every document had to be copied in color to show the severity of the issue and the life he is living now after ruining her live forever. The folders were labeled according to the order in which attorneys expected to be presented along with an outline to keep the attorneys in the correct direction. Organization is important because the trials or

confrontations are fast and have to be accurate to keep a positive image and level of professionalism of the attorneys and project confidence to the client. The case did not settle then, but most of the work was done for when they go to trial if the football player does not agree to pay the amount she is requesting. My opinion and Mr. Courtney's is that the plaintiff is who is a public figure does not want to see himself engaged in an obscure path in his professional life now when he is at the top of his career. Therefore, he will pay the plaintiff what she is asking. Organization was important to maximize the success in each case, especially in court where the judge has several cases and can only allow certain amount of time for each case.

While at the office, Horacio, the client who we drafted a will for, asked me to interpret for him in court for a landlord/tenant case. In this case I was only interpreting for the plaintiff who was asking the court for damages to the house, rent owed, and for violating other lease agreement clauses, such as having more than the people who were listed in the lease agreement. This case was different because I did not know the specific facts of the case because I was there to only to interpret. When the plaintiff and I sat in front of the judge, I immediately informed him that I was the interpreter for the plaintiff and when he was about to start the case the defendants told the judge that they did not speak English. The judge paused and asked me to interpret for them, I explained to the defendants that the court only provided an interpreter for criminal cases therefore; they will have to bring their own interpreter or allow me interpret for both parties if everybody agreed.

Before beginning the case, the judge made sure that I was not related to any of the parties to guarantee I could impartially interpret for all. This experience was

uncomfortable because I was paid by the plaintiff, but at the same time it was rewarding because the judge expressed his appreciation towards me for making his case happen without delay. This time since I was only interpreting at the court house, I had the opportunity to observe people who were in the court room waiting to be called by the judge to present their case, the expressions of each person was different. Some were concerned about the result of their case and most of them did not have the experience to be in a court room representing themselves. There were people who did not have any evidence to show the judge why they were asking to be paid by their tenants and the judge had to re-set a future date to hear the case again and give people time to bring the evidence. After observing all the mistakes made in court by the inexperience of people who represent themselves to save the attorneys fees, I would never recommend anybody to go in front of a judge without an attorney; but if someone wants to self-represent it is wise to at least research some of the rules of law and the procedures at their courthouse.

I spent a lot of time in the court room with two of the attorneys and each time was exciting and full of new learning experiences. I attended two cases for a change of custody, but I prepared documents for several of those cases. In one of the cases the father was requesting change of custody of his twelve year old daughter Melisa which meant the separation of two sisters. He based his claim on the fact that his daughter did not wanted to live in Kokomo because she hated the school she was going to attend the following school year. In this case the daughter was old enough to talk to the judge and expressed her feelings so the judge met with her and both attorneys in private. Both parents seem unwilling to cooperate to act in best interest of their daughter. The father accused the mother of getting drunk and when the attorney asked her if she got drunk, her

answer was positive which gave more power to the father's testimony stating that his ex-wife often got drunk during the week which cause Melisa to missed several days of school during the time she lived with her in Logansport. Therefore, after hearing the arguments from both parents who were drug addicts and the daughter's petition to the judge, he decided to give custody to the father. When the trial was over, attorney Bryan explained me that an attorney never asks a question for which he does not know the answer. He thought that she was going to deny the accusation but when she confirmed it, he lost all power in the case. The outcome was the change of custody and the separation of two sisters who more likely would affect their relationship between them.

The outcome of the case was not what was expected because the court does not like to separate siblings, but Melisa was old enough to persuade the judge and the irresponsibility of the mother who caused Melisa to missed school to many times it was a direct consequence for the judge's decision. The hearing lasted more than two hours and the scene followed after the hearing was sad and frustrating, the mother was angry, the two sisters were hugging each other, the father's reaction was sarcastically happy and I could not hold my tears. It was an emotional test for me because I have children and could not imagine if someone took one of my kids, I also confirmed my desired of not practice family law.

In the other custody case, the children lived with the father for two years after the divorce and even when the judge gave the mother custody of the children. She left the children with the father for a weekend and disappeared for two years. After all that time she came back and wanted the children back, the father returned them and continued paying child support. She kept the children for three months and gave them back to the

father again, this time she disappeared for one year but surprisingly enough she came back again but now she just wanted money from the father to sign off the children to him because she did not want them. For this case, I prepared the document in which the mother gave up all of her rights to have custody of her children and also a document in which she released the father of child support. She was so eager to live Logansport that she called the office to sign and finalize the case before the court date. It was sad to see how people fight and use their children as an instrument to pressure their ex- mate in order to get what they want, but since the children had been with the father most of the time the best for thing for the children. I did not have the opportunity to meet the mother of the children but I do not understand how a mother can reject her own children for anything else. I met the father who was young and seemed to be a good father, he cared for the children and provided for them, but as soon as the mother came back, he was willing to give her the children and pay for their support which confirms him as good and willing father.

For both of these cases, I prepared the child support sheets that the court requires prior to the hearing to see who will pay support to whom and how much it will be. The child support sheet is just the starting point for the court but parents can always disagree and ask for a revision of the amount. The child support sheet is done on an online software calculator located on the State of Indiana's website, it is easy to use and accurate calculates the payments according to the state guidelines. This software is used by all attorneys to create the child support sheet which allows them more time to focus on more important things than to manually calculate amounts as it was before this software was available. This software allows calculating an accurate amount in about thirty minutes

once all the information is available. The calculation was based on several factors; such as salary earned by both parents, whether they have other children for whom they are paying support, but the most important was the number of nights spent with each parent. First I entered the parent's names, their salaries, and the children's names and age; if one of the parents was unemployed, a minimum wage was entered and later revised with the new salary to ensure the more money for the children. After I answered all the questions, my name, the attorneys' name, and the case number was entered, because without this information the document was not accepted in the court.

Another type of case I worked on during my internship at Justice Law Offices was criminal cases. Most of the cases within the Hispanic community I was involved in, were traffic violations, but there were others like identity theft, and violation of probation. These cases were simple but complex at the same time because people were stopped for a traffic violation but ended up in jail. One of the most contradictory was Diego's case; he was a passenger in a vehicle that was stopped for speeding. Bertha, the driver, got traffic fine and the problems were over. But for Diego who was an undocumented worker, this was the beginning of the dilemma because the officers proceed to interrogate him in the vehicle to find out whether he was legal or not in this country and then he was arrested and transported to jail.

Diego spent four months in jail before he got out on a bond, with a felony on his record and two years on probation. He was accused of identity theft and lying to the officer because during the interrogation, he gave a false name before he gave his real name. The law does not require a passenger of a vehicle to be interrogated unless the officer has legal grounds, but the rule was not obeyed by the officer who cross-examined

Diego in the vehicle just for having dark skin. The immigration reform is the answer for people who were, and continue to be punished for working and earning a living without proper documentation.

Early in 2008, the Bureau of Motor Vehicles (BMV) sent letters to people who they suspected were using a false identify which resulted in the suspension and cancelation of an undetermined number of driver licenses. As a consequence, people lost their privilege to drive which has caused multiple arrests and separation of families because they are deported to their home country. There were many cases in which Hispanics were seeking legal help because they were caught driving without a driver license or for having it suspended, this was a simple problem for any American citizen but a difficult one for Latinos who do not understand the legal process. There is a process called Pre-Trial Diversion (PTD), according to the prosecutor this program was for first time offenders only.

The program consists of paying a fine and having good behavior for one year. In some cases the PTD fee was higher than the traffic fine. For Hispanics a clean record is imperative because anything can affect if an immigration reform is passed in the future. Another problem was the language barrier that some faced. When the attorneys first began to have these cases, I interpreted every time for each client and explained the PTD process, I made sure they understood that the program was great to clean their record but could also damaged it if they did not comply with the terms. The PTD cleaned their record if they stopped driving, did not have any other problems with the law, but if they were caught driving within twelve months, the program was voided, they loose the money paid, and they could face jail time. Mr. Coulter was patient and explained in

detail every step of the process. After multiple traffic violation cases, he decided that it was easier to translate the document which explained everything including directions to the court. But the clients still had to struggle through the process at the court house signing documents that were in English. These documents were explained in a limited amount of time in which the client and the translator did their best in absorbing all the information in it. I interpreted for two clients at the court in this matter and discovered that many people at the court house do not know why undocumented people could not obtain a driver license. Carmen, who is in charge of this procedure at the court house told Mario to get a drivers manual at the BMV and study it to take the test and avoid this problems.

In another traffic violation case, the client was terrified because his fine was \$10,000 for driving with a suspended driver license. He came to the office thinking that he would have to pay every dime of this fine. The attorney explained that this was a simple traffic violation and he did not need an attorney because all he had to pay was \$150.00 and take a defensive driving class to be able to get his license back. However, the client said that his license was suspended because he was using a false name to get it. He feared to be deported to Mexico for this violation and paid the attorney to go to court with him to pay the fine. He ended up paying attorneys fees, the cost of the program, the defensive driving class, and the fine for the traffic violation. The lesson learned from working with these cases was to appreciate the privilege to be an American Citizen and the opportunity I had to educate Hispanics about the importance to learn English and to educate them about the laws of this country.

For Hispanics, the traffic violations seemed to be the biggest problem in Logansport. This problem is due to people who drive without driver licenses but need to get to work while they can work. Part of the conflict arises because the governmental offices, such as Bureau of Motor Vehicles, believe that by not giving driving privileges to undocumented people they can minimize immigration flow in the United States. However, people keep on driving because they have to get to places some way, and by not giving them licenses they are causing more problems. The BMV does not know who is driving on the road and whether those drivers are qualified to do so. Most people, who came to the office during my time there, were honest people who were trying to make a decent living in the United States. I believe the issue is not whether these people have a driver license, but more so how can we help these people to more easily obtain a legal status in the US. I believe their desire is to be legal, law abiding citizens, but they often have difficulties obtaining a legal status, and in the meantime end up getting into legal trouble because of the choices they make; most of which are poor choices made with the best of intentions.

Another problem that seemed common among Latinos was what is known as identity theft. I witnessed two cases of women who were taken from Indiana Packer in Delphi for working with a bought identity. In both cases the documents where not stolen from the owners, but instead the owners sold their identity to these women. After the owners sold their documents, they changed their mind and reported the women on charges of identity theft. In one of the cases, with a lady I will who I will call Mercedes, the person who sold the documents had bad credit, she owed several credit cards and owed child support. Mercedes did not know it when she purchased the documents, and

she later discovered that she was paying debts that did not belong to her. Nonetheless, she decided to keep on working and pay the debts to keep her job, but after eight years when the debts were paid, no child support was owed and the credit was restored, the owner of the documents accused Mercedes of identity theft. Regardless of all the evidence presented during the case, the judge sentenced Mercedes to four years in jail and convicted her of eight counts. Attorney Courtney appealed the case on the basis of profiling and discrimination, which allowed Mercedes to be sentenced to probation instead of time in jail.

In June of 2009, the police knocked on the door of Mercedes mother's house, looking for Mercedes. She immediately came to the office seeking legal help and the case was retried this time on the basis of violation of probation. Mercedes did not speak English and her husband was her interpreter. Her husband took her and the children from Indiana to Ohio, then to California, assuring her that everything was fine and she did not need to report with the probation officer anymore. She trusted her husband and followed him, but he began to physically abuse her. Eventually, Mercedes made the decision to leave her husband. He came back to Indiana to file for divorce, she attended court in October of 2008, the divorce was finalized but she was not arrested. Based on this evidence Mr. Coulter took her to the court house thinking that she was going to stay out of jail until the case was decided, but she was arrested and transported to Logansport jail.

I visited the Logansport jail with Mr. Coulter several times to talk to Mercedes and inform her about the progress of her case. It was interesting to see how those television depictions of jails and prisons came alive during the summer. I was amazed but not surprise to see the flexibility of the jail's rules towards attorneys. In the

Logansport jail, attorneys can visit their clients any time between 9:00 am and 10:00 pm, any day of the week. We just showed up at any time and called a jailer from the speaker and someone brought Mercedes over to a room in which we waited. Mercedes' family, on the other hand, was only allowed to see her on Saturdays for fifteen minutes; this rule applied even with her children. The attorney explained to me that if she was to transfer to a women's prison, the policies would be different because she would be allowed to have more flexibility to visit with her children for longer periods of times. In a women prison Mercedes would also have the opportunity to visit with her family in a room where she could hug her children. Unfortunately, she is still in the Logansport jail and can only see her children through glass and talk to them on a telephone, for no more than fifteen minutes.

Mr. Coulter worked in this case collecting evidence to prove that Mercedes had no knowledge that she was violating her probation, and that she did not understand the legal system. With these claims Mercedes appeared innocent of the new crime, however every effort failed. Mercedes was a person of good moral character, who's only crime was the purchase of documents, which she obtained in an effort to have a job. It is difficult for me to see people like Mercedes going to jail for a mistake that was caused by various people (including herself), yet she was the only one punished. I understand her situation because she arrived in the United States at the same time I did, but her situation is very different from mine. When I arrived in the United States I had the opportunity to legalize my status; I was fortunate to be within the category of countries that the Immigration Department chose to legalize in the year I arrived. Therefore, it is difficult to accept that people, who deserve to have the same opportunities as myself, are struggling

to make a living in the United States. On the other hand, I also understand that violating the law deserves a punishment.

The most common obstacle I saw at the office regarding the Hispanic community was the language barrier. I saw the difference when they saw me at the office ready to help them and to explain their case to the attorneys. The language barrier that people experience when they are not fluent in English is immeasurable; they run the risk of having incompetent interpreters who may not be able to communicate the full meaning of the problem. Even when some of the clients spoke English, they felt more comfortable talking to me, knowing that they can express everything in their own language rather than struggling to get their point across in a language that it is difficult for them. There were several instances in which I translated for people who spoke English, but as soon as they saw me their attitude changed; they felt more relaxed, not only because I was translating but also because I understood their culture, customs, and in a way, I shared their experiences. However, the language is not the only problem among Hispanics; they also lack the knowledge to understand the legal system. This makes it very difficult to deal with legal problems in this country. I noticed in many cases that I had to stop and explain legal terminology to them because they did not understand what was happening with their case. It was easier for those who were more educated and those who could determine if a good translation was being provided for them. The internship gave a good grasp on the responsibilities an attorney has in real situations, which are quite different than the experiences I would have in the classroom. The internship gave me an out-of-the-classroom, hand-on experience that will benefit be when I am a practicing attorney. School was a good start to understand and prove that I was capable of learning new

things and dealing with issues in different situations, but it is nothing compared with real life issues. In school I was working towards a good grade but in the real court cases the mistakes were risking the client's freedom. Therefore, I had to be careful and meticulous in every task I performed in the office.

I had the opportunity to work in opening and closing files which was another part of the legal field. I was not aware of how organization was vital to the law field until my experiences in the law office. The amount of documents was enormous because new cases came in every day; the size of the case and the amount of work did not matter because every case was organized in the same way to keep uniformity and control in the office. To open a case, a new client sheet with the clients personal information, was to be filed out at the first meeting with the client. This procedure was done whether the client decided to hire the attorney or not; once the client hired the attorney, the document was entered into a computer program called Amicus Attorney. This program assigned a number to each case and stored the information needed for the case. The Amicus Attorney program was wonderful because it organized everything into a folder that made it much easier to search for information. Amicus Attorney was also helpful to make appointments with the court, record payments, and any correspondence between the client and the attorney; the system also helped in keeping control of closed files. The closing of files was another task that needed to be done properly to ensure easy access to old cases. Often closed cases were accessed to help in open cases, or in cases like Mercedes's case that was reopened two years later. These closed cases are reopened in an effort to find information for the new trial or to serve as a reference for a new case. Closing cases was an easy task, but it took time and good organizational skills to make

sure every document that belonged to the case was filed before closing it. The number system had to be accurate and the names on each case had to be correct, before entering it into the Amicus Attorney.

My experience with Justice Law Offices gave me a great opportunity to understand the needs in the community. The legal status in this country makes an enormous difference for all of us who want to have a better life, but we take for granted and cannot fully understand the benefits until we experience it firsthand. Education was a huge opportunity offered to all of those who want it and took advantage of it, but it was a huge obstacle for those who were not able to obtain it. The internship gave me the opportunity to see the problems in the community, not only among Hispanics, but also in the rest of the population in Logansport. This experience also gave me more courage to engage in my endeavor to continue furthering my education to become an attorney. My experience at Justice Law Offices was great because I learned that law is more than standing in front of a judge to defend a client who had a right to a legal representation. The variety of cases in which I worked was excellent because I saw the differences in approaching each case according to the need and the expectations of the client. Attending court was my favorite experience because it gave me first-hand experience with what I am going to do when I begin my career as an attorney.

The court attendance also taught me how attorneys work together even when they are on opposite sides of the case. There were times when they consulted each other about what to do in cases, particularly when they ran out of options due to the uniqueness of the client's situation. I learned that criminal cases were not as bad as I expected because an attorney has the right to reject the cases as he/she wishes, or to quit in the middle of one

if he/she does not feel comfortable. Overall the experience at Justice Law Offices was a great insight for my academic field, as well as for my future career as an attorney.