

LETTER TO MY YOUNGER SELF

Kim Boylan

Washington, D.C. Partner Kim Boylan talks about her life to date.

I grew up in the proverbial one stoplight town in New York's rural Hudson River valley. My hometown is most famous for its apples and farm markets and, for those familiar with MTV's *Jersey Shore*, for being Snooki's hometown.

I was the first person on my father's side to go to college. My dad owned his own business with his two brothers, which turned out to be a perfect example of why you should never go into business with family. It's also probably why, as a lawyer, I have always been in Big Law.

My mother was an ICU nurse for more than 45 years. She put herself through Fordham's nursing school against her parents' wishes after being a 'Rosie the Riveter' during World War II. My grandparents did not want my mom to move to New York City, but since that is where she met my dad, I'm certainly glad she did!

Law wasn't a natural choice for me. Few in my extended family had gone to college and there were no lawyers in my family.

Instead, I initially planned to become a psychologist. I have always been interested in true crime and, as creepy as it may sound, I was particularly fascinated by the idea of evaluating serial killers or the criminally insane. This was mainly due to the influence of one of my favorite cousins who was a criminal psychologist. Interestingly, many years later she was a member of the team that evaluated Jeffrey Dahmer for the State of Wisconsin.

My career plans changed when I took my first psychology class in college. I hated it and realized psychology wasn't for me.

After changing course, I ultimately graduated from Georgetown University, majoring in accounting, but always thinking I wanted to be a lawyer. I loved my tax and business law classes, but decided to postpone law school, and first become a CPA.



My father and I circa 1961



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With my husband Scott and our
newborn Catie in Alaska

On leaving college I worked at Ernst & Whinney (now Ernst & Young) as an auditor. Because I had been so interested in tax in college, I convinced the audit department to second me to the tax department during my first summer at the firm. I quickly learned that I did love tax, but that I did not like preparing tax returns, reinforcing my original thought that I'd need a law degree.

While I considered attending Georgetown Law at night and keeping my day job at Ernst & Whinney, the scholarship money offered by Syracuse University was too much to turn down. So off to Syracuse I went (for those who don't know, back in the 1980s, Georgetown and Syracuse were basketball powerhouses and were arch rivals, so this was not an easy decision).

I graduated from Syracuse in 1986 and got my first real taste of tax disputes work through my judicial clerkship in the United States Court of Federal Claims. That cemented my desire to pursue tax controversy work in my legal career.

This took some time. I started at Dow, Lohnes & Albertson in Washington, D.C., which was a firm that focused on media, cable, and communications law. I did a combination of tax transactional and controversy work and it was there that I first combined my former passion of true crime with legal work by representing an inmate who was on death row in Georgia.

I left Dow Lohnes after a few years because I wanted to join a firm that was known for its tax controversy practice. That firm was Mayer Brown. However, Mayer Brown was initially a case of 'right firm, wrong office' because all the work I was interested in (tax controversy) was done out of Mayer Brown's Chicago office. I spent the next two years trying to bring some of that work to D.C. I succeeded and later became the first woman to be promoted to equity partner in the tax controversy practice.

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Nine years later, in 2011, I joined White & Case.

I chose White & Case largely because I wanted to return to a firm that cared for its people and had a strong focus on mentoring.

I'd experienced that level of collegiality during my time at Dow Lohnes and Mayer Brown, but at Latham it had faded after the 2008 financial crisis.

White & Case was different. The Firm recognized the importance of having a good atmosphere, strong personal connections, and mentorship. It also had the truly international platform and extensive network that all of my previous firms lacked.

I particularly remember how helpful my then regional section head, David Hille, was in my early days at the Firm. He was wonderful at helping me navigate the network and introducing me to so many different people all over the world, making sure my colleagues knew who I was and what I did. That proved invaluable in the years that followed.

I also benefited from the Firm's training programs for new and lateral partners, which gave me a brilliant understanding of White & Case and helped me make lasting friendships with my fellow partners.

Then, in 2014, I got a call out of the blue from Hugh Verrier asking if I'd be interested in becoming the Global Head of Tax.

I'd only been at the Firm for a few years, so it was a complete surprise, but it was an opportunity too good to turn down.

I held the role for almost seven years and it was without doubt one of the biggest highlights of my time at White & Case and my career.

Leading a team of around 100 amazing tax lawyers was daunting. And having attended previous global tax meetings where people tended to sit in their own country teams and keep to themselves, I knew one of my priorities would be to bring people together.



With my mom and daughter Catie in 2008



“Tax controversy has always been of interest because it requires innovative problem solving and no issue is ever the same.”



Scott and I return to the donut shop where we first met during law school

So, in my first year, I organized a team building exercise at the meeting which challenged people to make a short, fun commercial for the tax practice. It really broke the ice and, since then, I've noticed a big improvement in the way we network and get to know people from different offices.

After my time as the Global Head of Tax ended, I have focused even more on my tax controversy practice. I love representing clients, largely in fights against the Internal Revenue Service (IRS), but also criminal tax matters, and in complex cross-border cases. Tax controversy has always been of interest because it requires innovative problem solving and no issue is ever the same. I also have again taken on a pro bono death penalty case in my newly acquired 'spare' time.

Over the years, I've been lucky enough to have had some incredible mentors who have shaped me into the lawyer I am today. With their guidance, and some luck, I have been honored to have won many awards, including Best in Tax Dispute Resolution and Best in Transfer Pricing in Euromoney's Women in Business Law Awards and International Tax Review's North America Tax Litigation and Dispute Practice Leader of the Year.

When I started in law, there were very few women partners. It's good for people to have female role models in the Firm so it is very heartening to see that the number of women partners has steadily increased.

That said, my biggest supporters and strongest mentors, especially early in my career, have been men. So, I'd encourage my younger self and any young lawyers not to get too hung up on whether your role models look like you. Instead, make a conscious effort to find good mentors, whoever they might be and even if they outwardly appear to be very different than you.



**"If I could live one day again,
it would be the day my daughter,
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Then, as you advance in your career, even while still an associate, remember to 'pay it forward' by becoming a mentor yourself. Not only does that benefit the person being mentored, but it's also a chance for you to grow as a person by giving something back.

Looking back, my younger self would definitely be surprised at what I've achieved.

When I was younger, my only ambition was to get to a point where I was earning enough to feel comfortable, but my aspirations for career and personal development became what mattered most and I've far exceeded my expectations. I've also been lucky enough to work with so many great people and loyal clients. In fact, there's nothing significant that I'd tell my younger self to do differently.

If I could live one day again, it would be the day my daughter, Catie, was born. My husband and I had known her birth mother all of her life and were blessed to have been given the opportunity (after 19 years of marriage) to adopt Catie. We travelled up to Alaska to be there when she was born, which was an unforgettable day. We even became temporary Alaska residents so that we could complete our adoption where Catie was born.

Catie is now 18 and, while parenting is exciting and challenging in equal measure, I'd not trade it for anything.

If I could have one final conversation with someone who is no longer with me, it would be my mom.

She was an inspiration (a very tough lady who went through a lot in her life), and I'd thank her for always being there for me and teaching me what I needed to succeed.



Enjoying spring break in Prague
with Catie in 2023