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Formellers Earn Law Degrees Times Three

Story by VALERIE PHILLIPS



Triplets Matthew, Kathryn and Christina Formeller graduated together from both Illinois Wesleyan and DePaul University. (Photo courtesy of DePaul University)

Daniel Formeller never imagined he was laying the foundation for a legal dynasty at DePaul University when he earned his law degree from its College of Law in 1976. But more than 30 years later he was on stage to hood all three of his children — triplets — when they followed in his footsteps at DePaul law school's commencement ceremony this past May.

"I think they wanted to do this together," said Daniel, who is managing partner at Tressler L.L.P., a firm he founded with five other attorneys in 1986. "They have always gone to school together, but they had other options. When Christina decided she wanted to go to law school it caught on. The planets lined up right for them."

Christina '06 is the youngest of the Formeller children, who oldest child Matthew '06 and middle child Kathryn '06 comprise the triplets. The trio attended Loyola Academy in Wilmette together and then Illinois Wesleyan, where Christina was a philosophy major and Matthew and Kathryn majored in business administration. So, continuing the tradition at DePaul came naturally.

"Attending law school with my siblings was just like every other experience we've had," said Christina. "People always ask us those 'what's it like' questions, but to be honest we don't know 'what it's like' because this is all we know."

The triplets decided on which law school they would attend soon after it became a unanimous decision to study law. Matthew explained that DePaul's part-time program was especially attractive for them, because they had to balance school with family concerns.

"Our mother had been diagnosed with early-onset Alzheimer's disease during our freshman year of college," said Matthew. "My sisters and I researched part-time programs so that we could attend class in the evening and care for her during the day. We knew that we wanted to attend a law school in the city, and we liked the idea of attending our father's alma mater."

The triplets spent their first year and a half of law school in classes together. They say that the novelty soon wore off but the benefits were lasting. For example, they had a built-in study group with members who were critical but loving, and they did not have to adjust to roommates who were strangers. But Kathryn remembers one of the best perks the triplets enjoyed.

“On one of our first days of class one of our professors recognized that we all had the same last name and that we were sitting next to each other in a row,” said Kathryn. “Being two girls and a boy he ruled out marriage and asked how we were related. When we told him we were triplets he told us that when he called on one of us, any one of the three of us could answer for each other.”

Even though the triplets attended DePaul part-time, the expense of sending three children to law school simultaneously could be staggering. However, the Formellers planned ahead and worked collectively. “This was a family decision that required planning because I wanted my children to pursue higher education and graduate school,” said the family patriarch, Daniel. “I financed most of it and that is a blessing; but the triplets worked and did their parts too. It became a family affair.”

Come commencement day, all the hard work and sacrifice finally paid off when Christina, Kathryn and Matthew were hooded at the ceremony by their father. It was a significant family moment, according to Daniel. “It’s a re-generation — the passing of the torch to them. From the back end of my career I get to watch the beginning of their careers.”

Upon graduation, the obvious question would be whether the triplets will continue their connection and go into legal practice together. While all are interested in commercial litigation like their father, no plans are in the works for them to pursue their legal careers as a threesome. But they are keeping their options open.

“As much as I have enjoyed sharing my life with my siblings, I think we are ready to head down our own paths,” said Kathryn. Matthew is a bit more open about the prospect. “We worked well together in law school, and I’m sure we would work well together as attorneys,” he said.

However, Christina is the most optimistic of the three. “Practicing with my brother and sister would be a dream come true; however, it seems unlikely that the three of us will find jobs together, given the state of hiring at firms these days,” said Christina. “We always joke about starting our own practice: Formeller, Formeller, & Formeller. Maybe in the future that will become a reality.”

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