

Personal Statement, August 2019

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Tennessee Justice Center Client Advocate Internship

When I was 13 years old, my parents interrupted my seemingly normal small-town America childhood with some shocking news: they would be traveling to Ukraine to bring home a new sister. Because I already had 3 sisters, I was hesitant to rejoice; however, when my parents arrived back home with a quiet 15-year-old girl who barely spoke English, I began to soften. Over the months following her arrival, and through the abysmal work of Google Translate, I started to understand the life my sister had lived before entering my family. She had lived a harsh, rural life in her early childhood. While I had learned to ride my bike and write in cursive half the world away, my sister dealt with her father dying and her mother waiving parental rights, leading her to an orphanage. My parents brought my sister back home to America just days before she turned 16, when she would have aged out of her orphanage. Slowly learning details about her past shed light on the harsh realities of a life I knew nothing about. It was during my teenage years, after looking at life through my new sister's eyes, when I decided I wanted to become an advocate for people who had grown up like my sister.

Throughout college, I used this passion to volunteer with children, veterans, and other groups that often need a voice. However, the first opportunity I have had to do legal work with people who need a voice was at the Tennessee Justice Center as a client advocate intern. There, I was able to represent Tennesseans whose stories often reminded me of my sister's, and this opportunity allowed me to affect their lives in a similar way that my parents affected my sister's life, although often to a different degree. The hope that the TJC gave each of the clients I worked

with inspired me to continue on with this work, both during my final semester of college and thereafter. Without the Jessica Jennifer Cohen Foundation's grant and support, I would not have had such a special opportunity this summer, and I am so thankful for the JJCF's part in this experience.

Moving forward, I plan to do consultation work for a non-profit through an on-campus group on my university's campus. I will also continue to volunteer with non-profits in any capacity I can until I graduate. I plan to apply to law school this fall, with an intended start date of Fall 2020. Until then, after I graduate, I hope to continue to work in the non-profit sector. I hope to have another opportunity to work full-time at TJC, but I will also be looking to work anywhere I am most needed. Then, after law school, I plan to return to the non-profit sector. These dreams may not have become so clear without my internship with TJC and the help of the JJCF, and I am so grateful to both groups for giving me such an invaluable experience.