



## **THE CHICKEN THAT SAT ME DOWN: A REFLECTION OF MY JOURNEY INTO LAW**

*Chloe Giacalone\**

### **Introduction**

When asked to write this piece I was unsure what I could contribute. Those that have gone before me have written about their personal experiences in inspiring ways. However, my personal journey is not inherently inspiring. Nothing happened that has shaped my life in such a way that I did a full 180. Rather, it is a story of reality about how I came to study law, how I feel studying it and what I think the future holds. In my case, success has come from a series of unfortunate events and failures. So, let us begin.

I am the product of hardworking parents. My dad, an almost stereotypical Italian who came from humble beginnings and worked his way up, and my lovely mum, a single parent, who stopped at nothing to ensure my sister and I had everything we needed in life. I had a relatively normal childhood, thanks to my extremely patient mum, who attended every cross-country run in the rain and stood rink side, freezing whilst I attempted to be a figure skater and who allowed me to grow into myself without judgement.

### **The Early Years**

The first thing to understand about me is, I never intended to study law. I wish I could say, like my peers often do, that I have known since an early age that I wanted to be a lawyer. But the truth is, when I was growing up, I had no idea what I wanted to be. I had interests which bordered on obsessive, such as making it my mission to write a factsheet on every single animal that roamed planet earth. But the first indication of a potential career came from my wonderful mum, who suggested becoming a vet. I took this and ran with it, telling everyone and their mothers I would someday be a vet. It remained this way until year 9 of secondary school when, whilst re-watching the Twilight movies, I decided I wanted to be an

---

\* Chloe is currently in the final year of her law degree

actress and a star. Looking back on this, I do truly wonder what I was thinking. Regardless, it is all part of the journey, so I am somewhat grateful that 14-year-old me was obsessed with R-Patz.<sup>1</sup>

This change in career aspirations led me down an extremely long path that fortunately led nowhere. The extent of my stardom was a questionable production of *Blue Remembered Hills* and a B grade.

### **The Chicken That Sat Me Down and Introduced Me to Failure**

I landed on Biology, Chemistry, English Literature and History for A-levels. However, history was quickly dropped when I realised that a) I had no real interest in the subject at A-levels and b) I found myself drifting in class. I was 100% focused on the sciences, with English literature being an excuse to read and write about books I loved.

I would be lying if I said my A-levels were a walk in the park, because they were not. I was technically studying A-levels for 3 years; of that I attended about a year and a half. Like many, I suffered with my mental health. This drained me of passion and motivation, and A-Levels quickly became my living nightmare. The finale of this nightmare came to fruition on exam day. The evening before I enjoyed the finest of cuisines: six chicken McNuggets. The morning of, I woke up with food poisoning, that I still describe to this day as the worst case of sickness I have ever had. Determined to prove a point, I sat my A-level exams at the back of the hall, blue bucket by my side and a feeling like I had been hit by a train. As you can imagine, my A-level grades were not what I was hoping for. In all honesty, they were in a completely different league to what I was aiming for.

This put me in a position of feeling like I had failed. It discouraged me from going to university and knocked my confidence. Instead of continuing my education like all of my friends, I decided to go from part time to full time at my job. I worked in a hotel owned by the parents of one of the *Dragons Den* panel, where I quickly became a supervisor. The job was fun, if you disregard the ludicrous amount of cream teas I had to serve, and the wasps I had to fight off during summertime. Through weddings, baby showers, and graduation parties I got to see first-hand the joy of people celebrating entering into the next stages of their lives.

However, the job left me wanting more for myself. This realisation came to me in a very

---

<sup>1</sup> Term for actor Robert Pattinson

boring and uninspiring way. I was polishing cutlery with a cloth, because as usual the polisher was broken. I was staring at the memo boards, and I thought to myself, and I rephrase this so I can include it in this piece, “what the heck am I doing?!” I had reached a crossroads: stay at this job or take the big step into the unknown.

That night, I logged into UCAS and filled out everything I had been too fearful to do before. It was a small action that ultimately changed the trajectory of my life. Once set up, it was time to choose my degree. This is where it gets... interesting. Before that moment I had never thought about a career in law or even law enforcement. I had planned to go into one of the sciences, bar physics. I still, to this day, cannot explain why 19-year-old me deviated from my original path and chose law. But I am forever grateful.

I chose five universities, which I eventually whittled down to Bristol, Swansea and Plymouth. I received offers from all, but as a result of my A-levels, needed to take an access course to get into Bristol and Swansea, and sit a foundation year for Plymouth. I chose the foundation year in Plymouth, so that I could stay at home whilst studying for the year. This was the best decision I could have made, as four months into my foundation degree Covid came to stay and ended up overstaying its welcome.

### **Losing Myself but Gaining a Friend**

At the start of 2021, however, my family moved away from Plymouth. I moved into a flat, which I ended up living in alone, as my flatmate was trapped in Paris with her boyfriend. I worked nights in Tesco and attended university online. I was completely isolated. I had thoughts of dropping out, feelings of disappointment towards myself and an overwhelming sense that I was not cut out for university. It was a never-ending internal war that I didn't know how to resolve. This battle against my feelings continued but got easier when I started making friends, the first of these being Jasmine and Chloe, who approached me to be in their group for a project. This was the start of a friendship that truly saved me from myself and continues to this day.

Whilst I won the battle, I did not win the war. Since the very beginning of my journey, I have struggled with imposter syndrome<sup>2</sup> and the overwhelming sense that I am here by mistake and not by design. Whilst not uncommon, as about 70% of people experience it in their

---

<sup>2</sup> The condition of feeling like a fraud and doubting your abilities, despite being high-performing in external, objective ways

lifetime,<sup>3</sup> it can be isolating. However, as Roosevelt famously observed, ‘Comparison is the killer of joy’<sup>4</sup> and can lead to feelings of inferiority. It is natural to compare yourself to others around you, and to feel that you are falling behind, or don’t belong. But the truth is we are, down to our very DNA, completely different to those around us. The comparisons I made between me, my peers and even my friends were debilitating. I didn’t complete the same modules as most, because my interests and the way I approached my degree were different. Naturally I felt like an outsider; that this degree wasn’t where I belonged. Now I am in my third year I have leaned into who I am. I have accepted that my path will be different, and that comparison serves no purpose in the grand scheme of things.

However, this feeling was greatly helped by joining the University of Plymouth Law Society, where I competed in and won student competitions, became Social and Communications Officer and am currently Vice President. These experiences manifested my capabilities and acted as a reminder that I am exactly where I need to be, even if my brain tells me I am not.

## **The Big Bad Future**

As a result of being in my third year, I am often asked the fun question of ‘what next?’. A majority of my cohort will be entering the legal sphere through training contracts, the Bar course, LLM’s and other legal positions. However, after four years at university, I am looking forward to my time being my own. I have no intention to continue my legal career just yet, which is a decision that often leaves the people I speak to baffled. My logic for this is simple: I want to enjoy life a bit before I spend the next 40+ years of my life working. I used to feel immensely pressured by the traditional notion that after university you find a job and start your career, signing yourself up to join the rat race that will end at 65, if you are lucky. I am here to tell you the world will not fall apart if you decide to take a break.

I often think about my ‘what next’ plans and wonder if I am making a mistake, taunting myself with the idea that maybe I should suck it up and start a legal career, even though the thought overwhelms me. But I have realised that it is okay to leave the career waiting for a little bit longer and to go and enjoy your life. I would rather take time off now and start my legal career refreshed, than dive straight in and risk burnout. So instead, I will be exploring my Italian

---

<sup>3</sup> <https://hbr.org/2022/01/youre-not-an-imposter-youre-actually-pretty-amazing#:~:text=There%20is%20a%20name%20for,and%20sense%20of%20self%2Dworth>

<sup>4</sup> A famous quote by US President Theodore Roosevelt

roots and enjoying the philosophy of 'il dolce far niente'.<sup>5</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Many people will talk about how changing their perspective on life changed who they are, but it is natural to have changing perspectives and values over time; it is an inevitable part of growing up. Whilst the journey to where I am currently has not been a smooth one, it has taught me very valuable lessons, including the need to slow down, reflect on my progress and celebrate my differences. It is easy to get caught up in the lives of others and compare your progress with theirs. But there is no need to worry about the things you cannot control. If I could go back and tell 16-year-old me everything I have achieved, I know that she would be proud. It is that very knowledge that comforts me and lets me know that everything will work out. Even if I take an unconventional route after university, I have achieved more than I could have ever imagined, and for me that is enough to get me through what comes next.

---

<sup>5</sup> Simply translated to 'the sweetness of doing nothing'