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By Robert A. Clifford
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Letter to a new lawyer — my daughter

Dearest Erin:
It seems like yesterday that I was reading you bedtime stories and taking you to pompom and cheerleading clinics. This spring, we proudly celebrated your graduation from DePaul University College of Law and now your family and friends beam with pride as you were sworn in as a member of the Illinois bar. How proud we all are of you that you passed that critical test, another milestone in your life.

This year, about 45,000 lawyers graduated from law schools around the country. Despite all that you hear about the dim job market, thousands still want to become lawyers and feel that it is worth the years of study, the expense and debt and the time spent learning the law. No one can ever take that away from you. You now carry the title of “lawyer” for the rest of your life. Carry it with the pride that I have for at least three decades. It is something that has made all of us a distinguished group and we are so happy to have you join us.

Recently, I had the privilege of interviewing U.S. Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor and I was struck by the fact that the first thing she said was that we are indeed “a noble profession.” As I reflect on what is meant by the term “noble profession,” what comes to mind is that taking the oath of lawyer obligates all of us to act in the best interest of those we serve — our clients. You need to look no further than those who signed the Declaration of Independence — 24 were lawyers or jurists — to identify founding lawyers who acted nobly to create our great nation. It is in the memory of those who signed a document that would establish a nation for them and for our futures that you placed your hand on the Bible to take an oath to your country and profession. I know you will hold your head up high as you

continue the tradition of leadership in upholding our nation of laws.

It is this sense of nobility that drew me and countless others to the legal profession, to be lawyers who instinctively desire to help others who cannot help themselves. And although you have seen the strain the profession can put on a young family, I am proud that you were able to see through the sacrifice and decide for yourself that going into this profession is still a good and right thing to do.

As you now prepare for a life different from what you have known before, I have some tips to offer, as many fathers do:

- Don't forget that our judicial system is the best and fairest method for settling disputes;
- Always defend the right to trial by jury. Citizen fact-finders are at the heart of the justice system;
- Support the Rule of Law. It is what keeps our country stable and free of tyranny and insures liberty for all;
- Vigorously defend our free and independent judiciary from political encroachment;
- Know that your reputation is what is most important. Your integrity in the legal community is your calling card;
- Always do what is right. The cliché “do the right thing” has meaning; the end does not always justify the means;
- You are the guardian of your morals as well as the gatekeeper of those of your clients;
- Return phone calls and e-mails promptly. Communication with your clients and community is essential to success;
- Get involved in the bar associations. That will make you a better lawyer. You will learn a great deal, stay on top of what is happening and make friends for life;
- Never stop learning. Always be inquisitive;
- Seek the truth. There are no stupid ques-

tions and discussing issues with your colleagues is one of the best ways to grow;

- Build relationships and learn to network with other people. Be especially good at this;
 - Read “To Kill a Mockingbird” again;
 - Get to know and understand your clients' needs and goals so you can better represent them;
 - Be proactive. Make your own opportunities;
 - Nothing stays the same. View change as a vehicle for growth;
 - Do pro bono work. Give back. Give as much as you get. Then give some more;
 - Make your mother proud. Whatever you do, assume your mom knows all about it;
 - Stay healthy so you can practice law for the rest of your life;
 - Only time and commitment will determine your level of success;
 - Be honest;
 - Love what you do. Your life's work will not be a “job” if you do;
 - Like the famous Apple computer saying goes, “think different.” Think out of the box for solutions. Ideas can be powerful;
 - Be willing to share what you know. As you gain experience, the concept of mentoring will become clear;
 - Don't forget about the importance of loyalty;
 - Learn to laugh. Have fun;
 - Focus on what you can control. Don't worry about what you can't; and
 - While the law will let your dreams come true, always make time for family and friends.
- Above all else, know that mom and I will always love you. You have always made us so very proud!

Love, Dad ■

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