

# *IN SIGHT* for Oregon Lawyers and Judges

IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF YOUR PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL LIFE

## HOW I NETWORKED MY WAY INTO A NEW LIFE

I was born and raised on the East Coast, but I always wanted to leave. It just never felt like a good fit for me. I moved around some after college but ended up back in my hometown to finish law school. After clerking for a federal magistrate judge, I went down to the Caribbean to my parents' native country to do much needed human rights work. I had always wanted to give back to that community and finally could with my law degree. I went to work as a pro bono lawyer, then got an offer to work for the government doing international compliance work. I stayed for almost four years. In the meantime, I got married and had a daughter. I was "exiled" when the government collapsed in 2004. I again found myself in my hometown where I had most of my professional contacts. Sure enough, I landed a government job and ended up staying for 10 years. After caring for two aged and dying parents, I finally said, enough is enough. It's my time now. I never wanted to be here in the first place.

Initially, I had no idea where I wanted to move. For a long time, I told very few people that I was planning to make a move. I knew that people might question my decision, and I enlisted core support from a few close friends and family members.

I began to methodically research cities that would be more affordable and easier to manage. For a while I even moved to the suburbs, but it was just as difficult and expensive. Then Portland

came on my radar. Though I'd never been there, I met someone from Portland literally at a party and I thought, "that sounds like a cool place for my daughter and me." Suddenly, *The New York Times* had a new article about Portland almost every week. The city seemed like it might be a good fit for us, but I still wasn't sure how I would manage a move across the country and finding a new job in a city I'd never even been to.

Even though I would be breaking into a whole new legal scene, everyone said it was a city of transplants. I approached my job search methodically. I started with my undergraduate and alumni networks and contacted a few alumnae who lived in Portland. The first person I emailed is now known as my "Portland fairy godmother." She was the first person I actually met, and she was amazing. Her son lived on the East Coast and she was planning a trip to see him, so I met her for lunch while she was in town. We chatted for hours and the stage was set. She was and still is wonderful to me. She took me under her wing and really encouraged me to make the move by sharing her passion and her contacts. It just mushroomed from there.

My daughter and I first visited Portland in December 2013 for one week. I must admit that I didn't tell my daughter right away that I was thinking of moving here. We had a blast! We were back just six weeks later to look at schools. She shadowed at a middle school that ended up being a great fit for her. Meanwhile, I

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networked, networked, networked. On the first visit, I talked to more than a dozen people over coffee. Wired! When I came back in February, I had another 20 or more meetings over coffee. In total, there was probably a universe of 45 people that I wanted to talk to, and I talked to them all. I maximized the time I had, and I was energized.

In April 2014, I applied for the position I currently have. I had a genuine interest in working here, and I really embraced their vision. They seemed interested but were not convinced I was actually going to pick up and move across the country. I kept in touch and emailed the office every couple of weeks.

I applied for other jobs as well, but I started wondering whether I needed to actually be here in order to persuade employers that I was serious about Portland. I decided to resign, take a month off, withdraw some savings, and just drive west. I enrolled my daughter in school and found a place to live. Most people thought I was totally insane. I thought, well, I'm not going to starve. I'll do temp or contract work if I have to until I find something permanent. Somehow I'll make it work. But I need to be there in person. I was totally motivated. It was a leap of faith. Faith in myself.

When I arrived, my first call was to my current office. "I'm here!" After a meeting and a lunch, I was told that there were no current openings. Then, I got the call. Temporary at first, then a permanent position came in the next budget cycle.

I had put in almost a year of laying the groundwork from the time I made those first phone calls to the time I started my first day at work.

This is a wonderful position. The learning curve has been steep at times, but also really enriching. This office has a sense of Northwest camaraderie that did not exist on the East Coast. I've found my place. My daughter has found her place. I'm already volunteering on various boards. I never would have had time to do that before. I'm in a fulfilling relationship. On the East Coast I was just kind of subsisting, but here in Portland I am thriving.

My move to Portland was the right move at the right time. Everything clicked. People thought I was

crazy to leave a government job that I'd had for 10 years. But I believed in the pot of change. I believed in me. I convinced myself that I'm competent, capable, and experienced. I was not living the life I wanted, so I soul-searched, researched, prepared, waited, and then the time came to head west.

What can I share? Do not look back. Don't second-guess yourself that now is the right time. Your time. That doesn't mean that you can just sit around waiting for something to happen. You have to be committed. Make it your job to network. Hook onto whatever connections you have. If someone shares a contact, call the person right away. If people don't respond to you right away, be persistent. Portland is a small town where people are very accessible. Make the call, send the email. Then get on a plane or pack your car and take a journey. Embrace it. Hey ... you never know.

#### BLOOMING IN PORTLAND (NO SHOWERS, NO FLOWERS)