

A Chance to Shine

Doug Wood's UNH Law scholarship rewards late bloomers

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DOUG WOOD '76JD (LEFT) AND MICHAEL STRAUSS '15JD IN WOOD'S MANHATTAN OFFICE. Within two years of graduating from UNH Law, Michael Strauss '15JD was rubbing elbows with celebrities in an exclusive 5th Avenue club and helping to negotiate a multi-billion dollar collective bargaining agreement from the Waldorf Astoria in Midtown Manhattan.

Now, while his days remain crowded with complex work at a major multinational law firm, his nights are spent in his New Hampshire home, with his wife and infant son.

Strauss wouldn't have had the opportunity to experience both lifestyles — or the encouragement to pursue them — without the Douglas J. Wood Chairman's Scholarship from UNH Law, or its benefactor, Doug Wood '76JD. "None of this is possible without Doug Wood, that scholarship and my relationship with him," says Strauss. "It's about Doug's willingness to embrace people and give them a shot."

Indeed it is — the scholarship provides merit-based support for second- and third-year students who demonstrate academic excellence but did not receive scholarships upon matriculation.

That was Strauss, a self-described "horrible" student in high school and college who got by on his ability as a test-taker. It wasn't until he arrived at UNH Law that he discovered his passion and began to excel in the classroom.

That was also Wood, an "under-performer" in college who applied to 25 law schools but was admitted to just one: UNH Law (then Franklin Pierce Law Center). A member of the school's first graduating class, he has risen to prominence in international entertainment and media law at the global firm Reed Smith.

In 2005, Wood used a gift he received from a client to initially fund the scholarship, which has supported four to six students per year, and he's contributed to it every year since. He remains the largest benefactor in the school's history, having also funded its Sports and Entertainment Law Institute.

"I'm very proud of the scholarship. It's a legacy that means a lot to me," Wood says. "It's important for people to be given opportunities where others may have doubted them. It's all about giving people who work hard a reward for that effort — about giving back to those who gave you a chance and paying it forward. Every graduate should think about that."

Strauss was hired by Reed Smith out of law school and worked closely with Wood for two years, enjoying the trappings of "big law" work in New York City. But the pull of New Hampshire was strong when Strauss and his wife wanted to start a family, and he — with Wood's encouragement — ultimately landed in the Manchester office of Nixon Peabody, which has locations in numerous major U.S. cities as well as London, Singapore and Hong Kong.

For Strauss, it represents the perfect work-life balance. "I'm back in the mix of the high-level work, but I get to go home to a house with a backyard instead of a one-bedroom apartment," he says. "Without Doug Wood taking a chance on me, my law career would have had a much different trajectory."

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