

## Leah Callaghan Schwartz Ranck & Schwartz, LLC Jackson, Wyoming



The Young Lawyer Section of the Wyoming State Bar strives to include, shed light on, and promote our own young lawyers (those aged 18-35 and/or within their first five years of practice) in the state of Wyoming. This article spotlighting attorney Leah Callaghan Schwartz of Ranck & Schwartz, LLC in Jackson, Wyoming, is the first in a series featuring the Bar's young lawyers.

Leah grew up in Jackson, Wyoming. Like many of us, she left Wyoming to study (at Stanford University) before returning to her home state for law school and eventually for her career. Her desire to be close to her family and to raise her children in the Teton area

were major reasons for coming back to Wyoming and eventually back to Jackson. Leah and her husband Brad Adams (a UW College of Law grad himself) share much in common with most Wyomingites including a love of the outdoors and the "open space and pace of life here." As for hobbies, Leah describes them as limited since becoming a parent ("does changing diapers count?"), but, she says, "I love hiking and cross country skiing and I aspire to engage in the arts more (including singing and theatre) and I'm an avid reader and Shakespeare junkie."

Similar to many young lawyers, Leah was not sold on law school from the get-go, despite her family's legacy in the law (parents Bill (pictured at right) and Cheryl Schwartz are Wyoming lawyers and so were both of her grandfathers). She explains: "I fought against the idea of law school for some time because I felt I needed to chart my own course." After college, she worked in marketing and spent some time as an outdoor educator. Ultimately, though, Leah was inspired by the example her parents set and what she saw of their practices growing up. "People came to them at some of the most challenging times in their lives, and they helped see them through. And it seemed they were always engaged in interesting

issues and problems involving lofty and academic concepts but also normal people and relationships. It finally struck me that I could be a lawyer too while still carving my own path."

Leah recalls deciding to attend law school at UW in a way that only those of us who have endured three years of Laramie weather can relate to. "I remember flying to Denver from San Francisco to visit the UW College of Law during a snowstorm. I met with then Dean Jerry Parkinson and toured the clinics where I first encountered John Burman. Despite the brutal weather, I came away feeling very much at home in Laramie and on that campus. To me it was all

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about the people and returning to the fresh air of Wyoming; even the gale-force winds felt welcome compared to the traffic of the Bay Area." Leah had considered other law schools, but the UW College of Law outfitted her with the tools she needed to be a successful litigator, without the debt that accompanies many newly minted JDs. She also benefitted from the intimate and per-

sonalized instruction from the incredible faculty at UW Law. "I worked as an intern and student director of John Burman's legal services clinic and that experience more than any other helped educate me about how to accomplish a result in court while prioritizing the everyday integrity and respect for others that John brought to his life and work. John was my first mentor and when confronted with dilemmas in my practice I still ask myself, "What would John do?"

Leah was a talented law student who naturally excelled in legal studies. She was the first recipient of the prestigious Brimmer Scholarship. After law school, Leah was fortunate to land back-to-back clerkships in Cheyenne. First, she clerked with Judge Nancy Freudenthal of the U.S. District Court for the District of Wyoming. After that, she clerked with Judge Phillips of the U.S. Court of Ap-

peals for the Tenth Circuit. Leah describes both as “major influences and role models.”

Following her clerkships, Leah went to work for Davis & Cannon, LLP in Cheyenne where she encountered another significant mentor, Kim Cannon. “Kim was and remains a very important teacher to me. If you’re interested in seeing a stellar trial lawyer in action,” Leah says, “ask Kim if you can come watch him at his next setting.” Leah invested several years with Davis & Cannon before returning to Jackson to pick up the reins as managing partner of her family’s law firm, Ranck & Schwartz, where she says she has found real rewards in practicing alongside her dad. “It’s such a privilege working alongside him and learning from him. Not only is he a great thinker and advocate, but he has also shared so much with me about maintaining a healthy and well-rounded life as a lawyer. I know working with family isn’t for everyone, but we’ve had a blast.”

Like many of us, Leah was not without struggles as she first started out in practice. “Young lawyers face so many challenges, but for me the biggest has been knowing when and how to trust my instincts and assert myself. No young lawyer wants to exhibit a lack of humility or disrespect for more seasoned practitioners, but it’s also a mistake to stay silent or forego important advocacy on behalf of a client just because you’re decades younger than anyone else in a room (and maybe the only woman).” When asked how she overcame these struggles when she first started practicing, Leah says, “It helps to have others who believe in you and can vouch for your ability to contribute. But absent that, there’s no substitute for doing the work and being prepared. Eventually others will give you the time of the day. Or they won’t, in which case don’t sweat it. It’s a fine line, but I’m constantly reminding myself that caring about the work that makes up a reputation doesn’t mean you should preoccupy yourself with reputation itself (i.e., what others think of you).”

Leah has also had her own brushes with burnout but learned to push through. “Whenever I’m feeling down or overworked, I remember there is a natural ebb and flow to life as a lawyer and one of the real joys of practicing law is that no one day is exactly like any other.” When asked how else she copes, Leah says nothing beats taking a break. “It helps if you can embrace the periods of less intensity rather than stress about when and how the next case will come through the door (it will). I also try to go for a walk every day and rarely miss a dinner with my husband and kids. Maryt Frederickson (who writes the “Be Well” column for the *Wyoming Lawyer*) says to take a two-week vacation every year and I’m also a firm believer in



that.”

As Leah prepares to transition out of the Young Lawyer Section of the State Bar, we asked for some specific words of advice for those “hanging their shingle.” Leah offers the following: “The scary thing about starting out as a lawyer is you don’t know what you don’t know. Anyone who is going it alone really needs to cultivate mentorship and support because in my opinion you can’t do without it. A lot of luck is involved in finding great mentors, but clerkships are one way to get exposure to different lawyers and see who stands out. I’d also recommend asking bar leadership and judges who they have been impressed with in court and motions practice.” Leah also recommends building your professional integrity from the start. “When you say you’ll do something, do it. It’s simple advice, but my grandpa lived by this and in my mind it really is what makes up a career (and life) of integrity.”

Finally, when asked what advice she would give a younger version of herself, Leah says, “I would tell myself to worry less about closing doors. There are so many amazing opportunities in this world and life, but so far, I’ve found real rewards in committing to my choices. Judge Freudenthal has another way of talking about this—she told me it’s important to say ‘no’ to some things because that means you’re saying ‘yes’ to others. I love the things I’ve said ‘yes’ to in life, most especially my husband and our kids. I think a younger version of me (who wanted to do all the things) would find a lot of comfort in that.”

Leah encourages any new lawyer or law student who wants to chat about life choices, the law, or anything else to give her a ring. **WL**