

## THE ROAD LESS TRAVELED JDs IN OTHER PROFESSIONS

# Writing Career Emerges After Stint As Sole Practitioner

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What do you do if you discover there are no practical ways to bridge the gap between law school academia and law practice? That was the intersection Brette McWhorter Sember found herself at in 1994 after graduating with honors from the State University of New York at Buffalo School of Law.

"I took a three-day course, 'Survival After Law School,' that is now offered every year by the bar association, along with CLEs and training offered by the Volunteer Lawyers Project," explained Sember. "I shared office space with another attorney and was fortunate that I could go to him for advice at times. But I was adrift with no real practical experience, and I ran into situations where I had no idea what to do."

With several years of experience, she moved her practice to her home when she was expecting her second child. She gave away cases and cleared the slate so she could take time off when her baby was born.

"I was dreading going back to work," Sember recalled. "I wrote about my feelings as a way to understand them and ended up with an essay. I sent it out to magazines and one bought it. About the same time I also got a call from an editor at a publishing company – in response to an ad I had answered in the *New York State Bar Journal* a couple years earlier."

The publishing contract with Sourcebooks evolved from a single self-help book on *How to File For Divorce in New York* (1999), to several other self-help titles including: *Landlords' Rights and Duties in New York*; *How to Form a Corporation in New York*; *Tenants' Rights in New York*; *How to Repair Your Own Credit and Deal with Debt*; and two books currently in the works.

While learning the ropes of practice, Sember accepted case assignments from the Volunteer Lawyers Project in Buffalo.

"Taking assigned counsel cases demonstrated to me the great need for clear and easy to understand legal information for average people. Many people are unable to afford legal services and yet do not qualify for free programs. These are the people who need books that guide them through the process of accessing the law themselves."

Once she was published, Sember found that opportunities were plentiful.

"I have been a contributing writer for other 'how to' books by Simon and Schuster and Publications International. Meanwhile, I also established a network of contacts among newspapers, magazines and websites, which



BRETTE MCWHORTER SEMBER, ESQ.

provided a variety of writing opportunities."

A frequent contributor to *Lawyers.com*, *MyCounsel.com*, and *eHow.com*, Sember is able to spend time with her children while maintaining a constant flow of writing on small and large projects.

A native of the Buffalo area, Sember has lived in either Erie County or Genesee County her entire life, including the years earning her BA in English at the State University of New York at Buffalo, and her Juris Doctor also from Buffalo. With a passion for reading, Sember finds writing a natural extension of who she is.

"Both of my parents are teachers, and my mother also writes college texts," Sember explained. "I got my first taste of professional writing helping my mother with manuscripts when I was in high school and college. I received an English Award in 8th grade from one of my

English teachers who had encouraged my writing skills. I was also an editor on my high school newspaper staff, and co-editor of our literary magazine. I majored in English because it was my first love."

In addition to writing on many legal topics, Sember also has experience in a number of other genres. She writes a family activity column in *Western New York Family Magazine* called "TogetherTime". She has a book review column with *Northwest Baby and Child Magazine*, and also does website reviews for *Big Apple Parent*. She has published a variety of freelance articles and essays about travel, business, family life, women's issues, parenting, and food, and is working on several children's books.

At this point Sember's children are ages 9 (Quinne) and 3 (Zayne). Her husband, Terrence, is a sales and marketing manager for *BusinessOnline.com*. They live in Clarence, NY, with their two golden retrievers, Izzy and Ivy, a guinea pig named Lettuce, and a variety of creatures her three-year-old son finds in the yard.

Sember is currently teaching a community education class on freelance writing, and plans to create a summer enrichment program for children or offer writing seminars as time permits.

"I don't plan on going back into practice," Sember said. "I love the freedom and creativity my writing career gives me."

*This monthly column in The Daily Record is intended to spotlight some of the career alternatives that law school graduates make, and identify some of the local lawyers who have found a unique niche to use their degree. If you know of jobs or people that fit this bill, please contact Nora Jones with names and details. nora.jones@nydailyrecord.com or 232-6920.*