

Lessons I've Learned in Legal Assistance...

A Legal Assistance Attorney looks back on her year practicing "LA" law...

by Lauren Pope

Having served over a year as a legal assistance attorney, I have certainly seen a lot and heard a lot. I have been amazed at the situations people manage to get into and appalled at the way some people treat others. I have often gone home at the end of a long, stressful day thankful for a happy and quiet life. Out of all the situations I've encountered, I have managed to garner a few simple lessons that I'd like to share with all of you.

First, if you plan to get married, be certain you want to be with the person for the long haul. Learn each other's best and worst qualities. Spend enough time getting to know each other so that you have a fairly good idea what you are getting yourself into. Discuss things like money management, sex, deployment, and children. If there is an ex-spouse, perhaps talk to him or her about what caused the split. If neither of you is able to attend your own wedding, consider whether postponing is a better idea. I say all this because at least 50% of a legal assistance attorney's job is advising on divorce. And while I have been told some unbelievable, but true, tales

regarding infidelity, fraud, conspiracy, kidnapping, and abuse, I would much prefer to be advising on any other topic. It is far more complicated and expensive to get divorced than most people realize, especially when stationed overseas or when children are involved. And getting married will not solve problems that already exist between you. Plus, a military retirement can be divided after any period of marriage whether it is a day or a lifetime, which makes many service members extremely unhappy. The supposed "10-year rule" is a misconception.



Second, just because you are living outside the United States or your home state does not mean you no longer have to pay taxes. In some instances, you may be exempt, but those cases are rare. Be certain to check with your Tax Center or Legal As-

sistance Office for further guidance on whether you are subject to state and/or federal tax. At least in the Federal arena, the penalties for not filing may be



far higher than the amount you actually owe and they add up quickly. So if you are retired and haven't paid US taxes in a decade, or are a civilian who has been advised that you are exempt from state tax, or you just aren't sure what you need to do, you should go immediately to the nearest phone and make an appointment. And please, please, please keep in mind that an extension to file is not an extension to pay!

Third, you should always plan for the worst and hope for the best. By this I mean you should have a plan for your death, disability, unemployment, bankruptcy, etc. and once the plan is in place, hope

to never have to use it. If you skip the first step and merely assume everything will always be OK, you are doing yourself and your loved ones a tremendous disservice and causing more heartache should something happen. A will can take as little as 20 minutes to prepare, but can prevent innumerable conflicts and problems should you die. Updating your SGLI beneficiary information and DD-93 can take only minutes, but outdated information can leave those for whom you care most with nothing. Creating a back-up savings account or buying disability insurance can be easy when done little by little, but without them, you may find yourself up the creek without a paddle.

Fourth, if you think something is probably a bad idea, don't do it. I can't tell you how many times I have had clients tell me they thought something was a bad idea before they did it and yet they did it anyway. While many believe it is easier to beg forgiveness than ask for permission, it is typically far easier to prevent an action than to undo it once it has been done.

Lessons Learned in "LA"... (continued)

So if you aren't sure whether you are sober enough to drive, don't drive. If you have doubts about your upcoming marriage, don't get married. If you think you might be getting ripped off or scammed, find out before you transfer the money. If you aren't sure your spouse can handle a general power of attorney, don't give one to him or her. There are so many examples that fit into this rule that I don't have the space to list them all. I just ask you to think about your actions because sometimes they can't be fixed "after the fact" no matter how hard we try.

And last, but not least, no legal question is a dumb

question. If you need assistance with any type of personal legal matter, don't hesitate to contact your Legal Assistance Office. You are probably not the



only person in this situation or wondering the same thing. Your Legal Assistance Attorneys and Paralegals are here to help. We are bound by a strict confidentiality requirement, so you needn't feel like the

world will know your business if you ask for help. Sometimes the easiest way to avoid a problem is to ask the question that is nagging at you. We can only help you if you first ask for help.

I have thoroughly enjoyed working with you, and for you, over the last year. As I get ready to move on to other adventures, I will take with me many fond memories of my time here in K-town. Rest assured that I am leaving the office in good hands, with many fine people at the ready to assist you with your legal needs. *Tschüss!*



In other news at this hour...

- *USAG-Kaiserslautern Commander, LTC Mechelle Hale, presented the FY07 Army Chief of Staff Award for Excellence in Legal Assistance and the FY07 TJAG Award for Excellence in Claims Support in a special ceremony in the KLSC courtroom in January.*
- *In the same ceremony, CPT Becky Evans was awarded the Army Achievement Medal for her superb supervision of the Kaiserslautern and Landstuhl Tax Assistance Centers during the 2008 tax season.*
- *CPT Ryan Krohn received the Army Commendation Medal for his service as a Trial Counsel and KLSC Chief of Legal Assistance, before PCSing to Fort Lewis in January.*
- *The 21st TSC Staff Judge Advocate, Colonel Corey L. Bradley, presented Lauren Pope with the Commander's Award for Civilian Service for her outstanding performance of duty as the KLSC's Chief of Legal Assistance from March 2008 to March 2009. Lauren is returning to Ohio in April with her husband and their new baby boy, James.*