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IN SIGHT for Oregon Lawyers and Judges

IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF YOUR PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL LIFE

AN UNINTENDED DESTINATION

I moved to Portland from Washington, D.C., eleven years ago with my husband to attend law school. After graduating, I accepted an offer at the firm where I had clerked for the summer, working primarily with partners who practiced energy law. When one of the partners left the firm for a small boutique practice specializing in energy law, I decided to join her.

My career was going well. I respected and enjoyed working with all of the lawyers and staff at my firm. My clients were smart and ethical. The work that I have had the opportunity to do for the past several years has been challenging and satisfying. Before leaving the East Coast, however, my husband and I had not really come to grips with the reality of living across the country from all of our family. Last year, that reality hit home when my husband's mother died after a lengthy illness.

It was difficult not being closer when she was ill. We don't have children, and it seems that each year the opportunity cost of not living close to family members as they age, and to our siblings, nieces, and nephews, becomes greater. Late last year we finally made the decision to move back to the Northeast so that we could be closer to family.

Shortly after making this decision, I decided to contact the Oregon Attorney Assistance Program (OAAP) to help jumpstart my job search. The fact is, I had never actually looked for a law job. I was hired for my clerkships during law school through on-campus interviews scheduled through the career services office. The firm where I clerked the summer after my second year extended an offer to join the firm as an as-

sociate after graduating, which I accepted. The partner I worked most closely with at my first firm asked me to come with her when she decided to join my current firm. After the fortunate serendipity of my first few positions, the prospect of conducting a transnational job search seemed a little overwhelming at the outset.

I was aware that the OAAP offered assistance to lawyers making job and career changes and made an appointment to meet with one of the attorney counselors. I also decided to participate in one of the evening career satisfaction workshops that OAAP periodically offers. Through the self-assessment exercises, I confirmed that I enjoy many aspects of my practice (research, analytical problem-solving, and meeting with and advising clients). I realized that I prefer working on big projects for large clients that I can immerse myself in rather than being spread across multiple projects for a number of clients. I also identified that many elements of litigation do not fall within my professional comfort zone. I determined that I was far more interested in pursuing an in-house counsel or public sector position than in remaining in private practice. The workshop also reinforced how important networking was going to be in my job search, which was kind of anxiety-provoking for me as someone who falls on the introversion end of the spectrum.

Equipped with these insights about my professional preferences, we decided to target our transition efforts on relocating to the Northeast where the majority of our family live. I utilized LinkedIn and my contacts in the energy field to approach attorneys working in-house for utilities,

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those in energy-related public sector positions, and those specializing in energy law in private practice. The career services staff at my law school provided me with a list of alumni working in the Northeast, which proved very helpful in starting my search. I scheduled a networking and job search trip to the Northeast in March. About seventy-five to eighty percent of the attorneys whom I contacted agreed to meet with me and were responsive and helpful.

This initial effort did not translate to any actual job leads, though, so I decided to cast my net a bit wider. I expanded my search to include opportunities in regulatory compliance outside the energy field and law-related opportunities in the insurance industry. Despite this additional targeted outreach, I did not receive a response to any of the applications that I submitted to positions that were outside of my direct energy law experience.

At one point during my search, I contacted a friend and former Northwest energy client who had gone to work for a Florida utility and was currently doing some energy work in the Northeast. We spoke several times, and he shared with me his job transition story and relocation to the Southeast and was able to provide me with several contacts at utilities in the Northeast. He also confided in me that he had recently decided to relocate back to the Northwest. One day, he finally called me to tell me that he had informed his employer that he was leaving to return to the Northwest and asked whether I would be interested in being considered for his job.

Although my husband and I have family in Florida and actually met there while attending graduate school, we had not considered moving back. We had been single-mindedly focused on relocating to the Northeast. I had reservations about adjusting to the climate and culture in Florida after enjoying living in Oregon for over a decade. I was also concerned about not being quite as close to family as I had hoped originally. (We would be about two hours away rather than in the same city.) After discussing this opportunity, I told my friend/former client that I was, in fact, interested in being considered for his position and submitted my application.

After one telephone interview, I was flown down for a full day of in-person interviews. Following the interviews, I met one of the women lawyers at the utility for dinner, who provided further insight into the culture of the work group and utility. My discussions with her solidified my belief that the position would be a good

fit for me. Ultimately, they offered me the job. At about this same time, I was offered a position as a hearings officer for a New England state government. Because this second job offer would have relocated us to the Northeast where we originally thought we wanted to be, we needed to carefully consider the implications of both options.

Weighing the pros and cons of both opportunities and with the support of my husband, I ultimately decided to accept the offer with the Florida utility. We will be living in a beautiful community on the Atlantic coast, just two hours from my sister and other family members. If we didn't have this family close by, we would not have considered this opportunity. My job will involve regular travel to the Northeast where my employer is planning power transmission lines. It will be much easier for us to visit family in the Northeast from Florida than it has been to travel from Oregon. It will also be much easier for my husband's family, located mostly in the Midwest, to visit us in Florida than it would have been in a New England location that is far from an airport.

My job search has led to a very unexpected destination. It was not what we had originally planned, but I am very excited to begin this next chapter of life. I realize now that being open to opportunities other than where I originally began looking resulted in my finding a new home – both personally and professionally – that will be a good fit for our family.

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