

Finding the Class of 2007

By **GLENN COOK**

WILL NEVIN ENJOYS rolling with the tide, no matter where it takes him. And over the past decade, that approach has taken him to interesting places.

He has earned four degrees over the past nine years, lost 175 pounds after a lifelong battle with obesity, started writing a weekly column on comic books, and acted in community theater. This is all while holding down a full-time job teaching journalism at the University of West Alabama and an adjunct position at his alma mater, the University of Alabama.

“It’s an interesting career and an interesting life, but I have a lot of fun,” said Nevin, who received the Minority Corporate Counsel Association’s LMJ Scholarship in 2007.

Nevin’s background and subsequent story illustrates the diversity of the recipients and the varied paths they have taken during the 11 years MCCA has awarded the scholarships. While the majority of the recipients go into some type of legal work after high school, many have moved on to careers in the corporate, government and nonprofit sectors.

“I came at the law from a very social science perspective, a very academic kind of lens,” he said. “I don’t know if I had any ideas about going into a law practice, even though I thought it was a fascinating field. I’ve always wanted to teach.”

LMJ Scholarship Helped Decrease Student Debt

Nevin grew up in Moundville, a small town less than 20 miles outside Tuscaloosa. His father worked in hospitals in the area, and his mother, a member of the Poarch Creek Indian tribe, taught elementary school. Although Nevin was not raised on the Poarch Creek reservation, he became aware of the poverty that Native Americans

face through his mother and extended family, and she urged him to apply for the LMJ Scholarship after seeing a notice in the tribal newsletter.

“Mom always cares about dollars and cents, and she knew that I would be footing the bill for most of my law school education,” Nevin said. “She said I should apply for it—give it a shot and see what happens—and I was really thrilled when I got it.”

The scholarship awards \$10,000 to first-year law students, a majority of whom receive the same amount for their second and third years. To a person, each recipient is both grateful for the money and for the doors the LMJ honor opens.

“It led to an internship with Freddie Mac in D.C., which has provided me with contacts, and certainly the money was a blessing,” Nevin said. “Between the MCCA and the Creek Indians, for all of my schooling I have only \$20,000 in student loans. When you realize that I have that much education and yet I’m not crushed with crippling student debt like so many others are, I’m really very lucky.”

Nevin is lucky in other ways as well.

Losing 175 Pounds Ushers in a New Lease on Life

In January 2010, during winter break before his last semester of law school, Nevin embarked on a three-day, cross-country road trip with friends to see his beloved Crimson Tide football team play for the national championship.

“On the morning of the second day, I was driving through some West Texas kind of scrub when I started to feel some pain in my chest,” Nevin said. “I thought I was having a heart attack.”

The feeling passed, and the trip continued, but Nevin knew something had to change. At 24, he weighed

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approximately 350 pounds, had not been to the doctor in four years and was exhibiting signs of pre-diabetes. The combination of law school and working nights for the student newspaper are not conducive to healthy diets and physical fitness, but Nevin said he had been overweight since kindergarten.

“When I got back from the trip, I sort of looked at everything,” he said. “I realized I was in the prime of my life. I was supposed to be happy and physically fit, so I decided I had to do what was necessary to make that happen.”

Even though he didn’t know the layout of the university gym when he first went, Nevin lost 175 pounds in 11 months through hours and hours of exercise. He also changed his diet to exclude red meat and fried foods.

“I wish there was some magical secret I could impart, but I’m the first to admit I did not do this ideally,” he said. “I should have seen a doctor and a nutritionist from the start, at the very beginning. But I really just spent a lot time in the gym and on the treadmill, and I was careful about what I ate. It just happened to work out for me.”

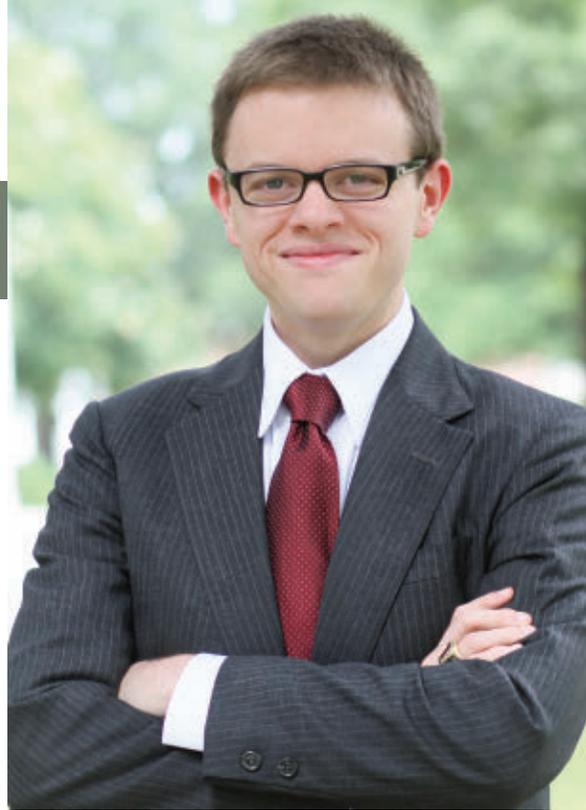
Teaching Media Law to Future Journalists

After graduating from law school, Nevin embarked on a combined master’s and PhD program in communication and information sciences. Two years later, he was working as an adjunct journalism professor, then became full-time in the fall of 2012 at University of West Alabama in Livingston.

“I don’t look at it as leaving the law and focusing on journalism. I certainly like writing and talking about the law,” said Nevin, who saw one of his commentaries on the First Amendment cited last year in *The Washington Post*. “And I love working with my students on media law. It’s really fun to see their eyes open to how the Supreme Court works and how the Constitution has been interpreted differently over the history of our democracy.”

Nevin believes many journalists do not have adequate training to write about complex legal matters in a way that is both accurate and that readers understand.

“The law can be reported on and analyzed better in journalism,” he said. “If you stick someone with a story who doesn’t have a firm grasp of what’s going on and expect them to report intelligently on it, it doesn’t al-



ways work out. I came across a story just the other day in which it was very clear the reporter has no concept of the civil law process.”

Nevin said his goal is to “try whenever possible to raise the level of discourse and understanding” among his students. Simply put, he wants them to know that “words matter.”

“The words we choose have meaning, and there’s a certain precision that is required when you talk about certain subjects, especially as they relate to the law,” he said. “That’s what I take away from the law: The choices in language matter, the statutes matter and how you write about them matters, too.”

Law Remains a Constant Presence

After the frenzy of the last decade, Nevin is enjoying the opportunities he has to explore new things. He started writing a monthly column on comic books for AL.com and finds himself gravitating toward authors, actors and musicians. Last fall, he acted for the first time in Theatre Tuscaloosa’s production of “To Kill a Mockingbird,” playing prosecutor Horace Gilmer.

The law remains a constant presence in Nevin’s life in other ways, too. His wife of three years, Kate, is a second-year law student at Cumberland Samford University in Birmingham.

“I’m enjoying teaching and writing, and I want to get better at both,” said Nevin, who just turned 30. “I just want to continue doing what I’m doing now, and look at new ways to do things that I haven’t before. I’ve got a lot of life ahead of me.”

GLENN COOK (glenncook117@gmail.com) is a freelance writer and photographer who lives in Northern Virginia.

The 2007 recipients of the Minority Corporate Counsel Association's LMJ Scholarship have gone on to varied careers in the corporate, government and nonprofit worlds.

Here is an update on the class and what they are doing now:

- **Francis Arvelo** is an attorney in Austin, Texas, practicing in the areas of banking, intellectual property and securities and investment fraud.
- **Samika Boyd** is an associate with Bondurant Mixon & Elmore, a private firm in Atlanta.
- **Pauline Chow** is a senior specialist in marketing and communications at Skadden Arps Slate Meagher & Flom LLP in Chicago.
- **Noelle Chung** is an associate in the Los Angeles office of McKool Smith, focusing on commercial and intellectual property.
- **Jerome Coenic-Taylor** is an attorney advisor and labor relations specialist in the Chicago regional office of the Social Security Administration.
- **April Gu** is associate director at the Center for Business and Human Rights at NYU Stern.
- **Ana Lucia Hurtado** is an associate in corporate restructuring at Skadden Arps Slate Meagher & Flom LLP and Affiliates in Wilmington, Del.
- **Elissa Johnson** is a judicial law clerk at the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of Mississippi and a former staff attorney at the Southern Poverty Law Center.
- **Leslie Lang** is senior vice president of strategic development and general counsel at Microclinic International in San Francisco.
- **Brandon J. Loggins** is an attorney with The Stuttley Group LLC in Homewood, Ill.
- **Dalaisai Nisperos** is an associate specializing in public and private sector law at Beeson Tayer & Bodine in the San Francisco Bay Area.
- **Estephanie Resnik** is an assistant county attorney with the Miami-Dade County Attorney Office, focusing on social service and public health trust issues.
- **Natalie Sanders** is an associate at Latham & Watkins LLP in Washington, D.C., focusing on regulatory and transactional matters.
- **Anthony Ryan Scott** is an associate dean of students at Virginia Tech University in Blacksburg, Va.
- **Jonathan Steele** is founder of The Steele Law Firm in Kansas City, Mo., focusing on personal injury litigation.
- **Robert Valenzuela** is a self-described "professional gadfly," working as a self-employed writer-editor in Greenville, S.C.
- **Alexander White** is a senior associate at Wilmer Hale in Washington, D.C.
- **David Zhou** is an associate at Wachtell Lipton Rose & Katz in New York City.

Details about the **LMJ Scholarship Program** can be found at www.mcca.com/scholarships. If you are interested in working with or donating to this program, contact Aracely Muñoz Petrich, vice president of strategic development, at amunozpetrich@mcca.com.