



## MCCA LMJ Scholars 2010

# Atticus Lee

By **GLENN COOK**

Atticus Lee has spent her life on the move, from Taiwan to Long Island to California to Texas, so it should come as no surprise that she took time off between jobs to travel.

**LEE**, A 2010 LMJ SCHOLARSHIP WINNER and 2013 graduate of the University of California-Davis School of Law, finished a federal clerkship with U.S. District Judge Vanessa D. Gilmore in August (2016) and left on a journey that took her to seven countries in seven weeks. Seeing what she describes as “diverse human and geographical landscapes,” Lee said the long trip abroad was key to her evolution as a lawyer, advocate and writer.

“I’ve been exposed to so many interesting and diverse cultures,” said Lee, who now works as an attorney for the U.S. Department of Justice’s Civil Rights Division. “I definitely wouldn’t trade my luck for anything in the world.”

Like many of the 180-plus law school students who've received the Minority Corporate Counsel Association scholarship since 2005, Lee has had to overcome significant obstacles in her path. Openly gay and a long-time LGBT activist, she is an immigrant who moved from Taiwan to the U.S. as a child, only to face bullying as well as racial stereotypes and slurs. But instead of withering under those and other pressures, she has been resilient and tenacious in pursuing a legal

Two of Lee's mentors, Stanford Medical School professor Carol Winograd and Pulitzer Prize-winning author Adam Johnson, tried to talk her out of law school.

career focused on helping others in similar situations.

"Being the youngest child of immigrants and being a first-generation immigrant myself, I have a unique appreciation for the American system, the relative lack of corruption in the American system, and the civilian experience of justice served," she said.

### **Pursuing the Law Was a Lifelong Passion**

Lee spent her early childhood in the countryside of southern Taiwan, moving to suburban Long Island in elementary school to live with her aunt and uncle. Having to learn a new language and growing up away from her parents, who remained in Taiwan, was "definitely rough on a kid."

"I definitely faced a lot of typical issues that youth from immigrant or low-income communities face, but it also strengthened my own identity as a queer Asian-American woman of color," Lee said.

Lee became active in LGBT and gender issues while studying human biology and creative writing at Stanford University, an academic path she describes as "a pretty special choose-your-own-adventure experience." At Stanford, she worked extensively on efforts to end women's footbinding in rural China and represented transgender and queer students on the Stanford Genderblind Task Force. She also wrote essays for the *New York Times* on gender and sexuality.

"The human biology major gave students the freedom to customize and design the elements of both hard biological science and political social science into a comprehensive course of study for three years," she said. "So what might sound like a straight-forward premed track was actually an intersectional study of human gender and sexuality, American sociopolitical

policy in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and a genetic study of the biological differences that drive—and maybe shouldn't drive—our society's treatment of sex and gender."

Two of Lee's mentors, Stanford Medical School professor Carol Winograd and Pulitzer Prize-winning author Adam Johnson, tried to talk her out of law school. Winograd, who "really opened my eyes to the work to be done in human society," thought she should be a professional writer. Johnson, a creative writing professor at Stanford, helped Lee develop her personal statement for law school while trying to "convince me not to attend."

But she would not be dissuaded from pursuing a career in the law, which she describes as a "lifelong passion." The most significant barrier was the "astronomical cost," which is where MCCA comes into the picture.

### **LMJ Scholarship Provides Financial Freedom to Choose Civil Rights Interest**

Started 12 years ago, the LMJ Scholarship is designed to help law students who are highly qualified but face steep financial hardship. Recipients receive \$10,000 for the first year of law school and can qualify for the same amount for their second and third years. Much of MCCA's fundraising for the scholarship program occurs at the General Counsel Summit each April. In November, MCCA launched the LMJ Scholarship Fund Holiday Drive, which allows anyone to donate.

"The LMJ scholarship was an incredibly generous grant that enabled me to apply for public interest and unpaid internships that would further my civil rights interests, instead of being financially pressured into going the 'Big Law' route like so many of my classmates," said Lee, one of 15 recipients in 2010, the sixth group to earn the honor. "They also started law school with a public interest vision but had to choose high-paying corporate positions in order to manage their academic loans."

While in law school, Lee continued to merge her interests, serving as the clinic director for the Sacramento LGBT Community Clinic and senior articles editor for the *UC-Davis Journal of Environmental Law*. She also wrote essays about gender and LGBT issues for a variety of publications, including *Ms. Magazine*, but still faced the prejudice she encountered as a child.

"Even as late as law school at Davis I endured racial slurs at the hands of classmates, but I took refuge in my studies, activism, and in wonderful professors, pioneering scholars who were also people of color," she said. "Nonfiction writing was this creative outlet that really helped me get through the craziness that is law school."

Post-graduation, she moved to Houston, where she worked as a clerk for Gilmore, a federal judge who presides over the Southern District of Texas.

“My clerkship was such a varied learning experience, and I learned an incredible amount about the practice of law, the legal profession and all its quirks and dusty corners,” she said. “And at the same time also faced the criminal justice system in an up close and personal way that drove me to become a civil rights attorney.”

Lee said Gilmore was “a tremendous mentor, not to mention a loyal personal friend and advocate and highly entertaining personality on top of it all.”

“She really encourages her clerks to question the status quo in understanding social systems and be fearless in our approach to the law, relationships, and life,” Lee said.

### A New Champion at the DOJ

In mid-October, after her seven weeks of travel abroad, she started to work in the Special Litigation Section of the U.S. Department of Justice’s Civil Rights Division.

Among other tasks, the section works to protect the civil rights of those who are incarcerated in juvenile detention and mental health facilities, or who have complaints against state and local police departments.

“It’s pretty surreal actually getting the job that I went to law school to be able to do, so I’m exhilarated and just so humbled by the opportunity to shape and better our world,” Lee said. “It’s definitely exciting getting to work on the controversial and hot-button issues of our time, and at the federal level.”

She remains thankful to MCCA for the money that “largely covered my law school tuition and professional fees” when combined with additional merit-based academic grants from UC-Davis and a \$10,000 scholarship from Latham & Watkins that recognized her “tenacity and dedication to inclusiveness.”

“The LMJ scholarship is the reason that I was able to pursue judicial clerkships and an ultimate job in public service and government work,” she said. “I am incredibly grateful.” ■

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

## The 2010 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:

- **Gueter Aurelien** is an associate with Venable’s Corporate Practice Group in Baltimore, Md. Her practice focuses on mergers and acquisitions, equity and debt financings, commercial loan transactions, corporate governance, real estate investment trusts (REITs) and general business law matters.
- **Adlah Chisti** finished law school and now is working on her master’s degree in public policy at Georgetown University’s McCourt School of Public Policy.
- **Adrienne de la Rosa** is an intellectual property associate at Troutman Sanders LLP in Atlanta, Ga.
- **Kelsey Eaton Fohner** is an attorney at Kutak Rock LLP in Fayetteville, Ark.
- **Donale Evans** is an attorney with his own practice in Houston, Texas.
- **TaCara Harris** is a civil litigation attorney at Baker Donelson Bearman Caldwell & Berkowitz, P.C. in Nashville, Tenn.
- **William Hudson** is an associate in the real estate department of Seyfarth Shaw in Atlanta.
- **Chanel Lattimer-Tingan** is an intellectual property associate attorney at Cozen O’Connor in Philadelphia.
- **Nicholas Meza** is an associate with Quarles & Lundy LLC in Phoenix, working in the firm’s Health Law Practice Group.
- **Jill Mitchell**, a former assistant district attorney in Kansas’ 18<sup>th</sup> Judicial District, is a Realtor for Keller Williams in Wichita.
- **Jason Sanchez** is a criminal defense attorney in Houston, Texas.
- **Malcolm Wells** is an associate at Paul, Weiss, Rifkind, Wharton & Garrison LLP in New York City.
- **Brittney Williams** is an associate with Littler Mendelson in Houston, Texas, where she counsels management clients in connection with a wide array of labor and employment matters.

Details about the **LMJ Scholarship Program** can be found at [www.mcca.com/scholarships](http://www.mcca.com/scholarships).