

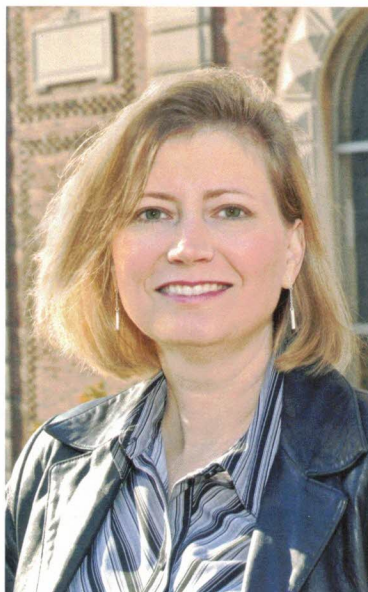
Barb Pitman

By MIRIAM FURMAN

Barb Pitman '10 has gone from foster child in Indiana to Columbia law student — with marriage, children and her college degree all in between.

“I had a noticeably compromised childhood — probably not the type that compares with the childhood of many of my classmates,” she says. “I figuratively pinch myself every day when I compare my childhood situation to where I’m at now and what I’m doing.”

Placed in foster care when she was six months old, adopted when she was four years old and then facing the divorce of her adoptive parents while she was still a child,



Pitman has had to cope with adversity. She grew up on a steady diet of food stamps, free school lunches and hard work.

Pitman, who bused tables at Dairy Queen at 14, graduated from high school with honors at 17. With no financial or familial safety net, she took out

loans, worked two jobs and put herself through two years of a business program at Ball State University in Muncie, Indiana.

With her associate’s degree in hand, Pitman landed a job as a secretary at Baker & Daniels, a large Indianapolis law firm. There, she met and married her husband, Tom, a Yale graduate and Harvard-educated lawyer, who is now a partner in the firm. Tom, the son of a taxicab driver, also came from humble beginnings.

The Pitmans raised two children, now both in college, and Barb pursued her bachelor’s degree at Indiana University while alternating between work and being at home with her children. She was a fire department volunteer commissioner in the town of Cicero, a speech and debate team coach at Hamilton Heights High School and Middle School in Arcadia, and taught piano to underprivileged children.

In 2005, Pitman received her history degree with academic distinction, along with an award for her senior thesis: “Culture, Caste and Conflict in New Orleans Catholicism.” It was accepted for publication in the historical journal *Louisiana History*.

Pitman did well on the LSATs, and Tom encouraged her to apply to law schools in the East. After searching the Web sites of leading law schools, Pitman set her sights on Columbia. It was the only school to which she applied.

“The Law School’s professionalism and the maturity of the students I read about impressed me,” she says, adding that the idea of living in multicultural New York — after spending her entire life in Indiana — was also appealing.”

Now finished with her first year, Pitman, who’s interested in both employment and health care law, anticipates working again for an Indianapolis law firm after graduation — but this time as a lawyer, not a secretary. 📍

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