



NEVADA TRAILBLAZERS

Meet Douglas Smith:

A History-Making Graduate of Boyd Law School

BY MARY BACON, ESQ. AND RYAN GORMLEY, ESQ.

When speaking with Douglas Smith, it does not take long to recognize his gracious and humble spirit. For instance, when asked if he was the first person with cerebral palsy to graduate from the William S. Boyd School of Law at UNLV, he downplayed his achievement, responding that surely must not be the case. Yet, upon further inquiry, it is. In 2017, Smith made history as the first person with cerebral palsy to graduate from Boyd.

“My accomplishments are a tribute to the goodwill of so many other people: teachers, family members, colleagues, classmates,” Smith said, with his trademark humility. “My life as a whole is a monument to the good will of others. And it is a privilege to have received and have witnessed the best parts of the human spirit so consistently over the course of my life. It has allowed me to accomplish what I have. Whatever I myself brought to the table, I received so much more through the sheer goodness of many other people. My success is a reflection of their humanity—and receiving that is a greater honor than the law degree itself.”

Smith was born and raised in Las Vegas. A self-described “indoor kid,” Smith, like many children, filled his days with comic books, novels, and anything related to “Star Wars.” Yet, given his diagnosis of cerebral palsy, a condition that affects a person’s ability to move and maintain balance and posture, Smith, unlike other children, spent significant time in healthcare facilities, pursuing various forms of physical therapy, occupational therapy, and speech therapy.

When the time came to go to school, Smith’s parents advocated for him to be placed in a traditional classroom alongside his peers. Although the system presented obstacles, because of his parents’ persistence, Smith was able to remain in a traditional classroom throughout his education. Looking back, Smith is grateful for his parents’ efforts and credits his parents’ example for teaching him the importance of self-advocacy.

After high school, Smith attended UNLV, where he graduated with a degree in hotel administration. With his love of language and a desire to develop his advocacy skills, law school seemed like the next logical step.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 27

Meet Douglas Smith

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 25

During law school, Smith worked with UNLV's Office of General Counsel as well as the Legal Aid Center of Southern Nevada. He welcomed the opportunity to combine his legal skills with his knowledge from his hotel management degree. While at the Legal Aid Center, he took great satisfaction in drafting due process orders to help secure educational rights for children with disabilities, knowing all too well the challenges that came with fighting for the education you deserve.

In addition, Smith was a member of Phi Alpha Delta, Toastmasters International, and an editor on the Nevada Law Journal (Law Review) at Boyd. He also served on the Just and Inclusive Law School Faculty Committee, where he pushed for a larger budget for disability services.

After graduating from law school, Smith worked for Backus-Carranza-Burden. He enjoyed the work, but as an avid lifelong learner, he missed academia. He applied for, and was accepted to, UNLV's History Ph.D. program. Smith is currently finishing up his coursework and will be writing his dissertation on the history of the Boyd Law School and its impact on Nevada.

"I first met Doug when he took my law-school seminar on the history of the long civil rights movement. His scholarly approach to the course materials impressed me," said Professor David Tanenhaus, who is Smith's dissertation adviser. "He wrote a beautiful essay about the significance of the Supreme Court's landmark decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954). I was delighted when Doug later decided to become a professional historian and entered the UNLV History Department's Ph.D. program."

On the road to becoming Dr. Smith, Smith shared his secret to success.

"Self-care and love are the real secrets," Smith said. "Being able to give yourself time to rest and heal does more than anything else."

And, as for his positive outlook on life, Smith spoke of the peace he found when he came to the realization that "life is not about chasing accomplishments; it's not your accomplishments that give your life value, but who you are as a person."

In his free time, Smith can be found binge-watching (or reading subtitles) of the latest dramas that come from Asia or reading classic literature. He's currently immersed in "War and Peace."



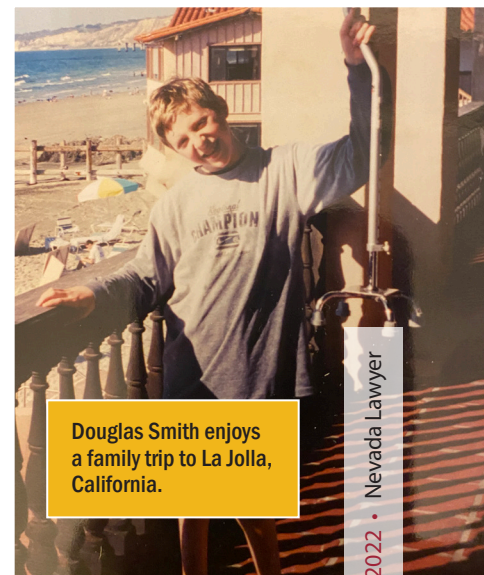
Douglas Smith graduates from the William S. Boyd School of Law at UNLV in 2017. Smith was the first person with cerebral palsy to graduate from Boyd.



Douglas Smith enjoys brunch inside Salt & Ivy inside the Aria for his Nevada Lawyer interview for this feature.



Douglas Smith sits for his elementary school picture day. Smith grew up in Las Vegas.



Douglas Smith enjoys a family trip to La Jolla, California.