

Jozee Puglisi

Interning at the Justice Court

This fall semester I interned at the Nogales Justice Court in Santa Cruz County. I worked directly with the Justice of Peace of Precinct #1. I worked in various departments, including the criminal department, civil department, traffic, and criminal traffic. I worked in a small office, with only 10 people and then myself, so I was able to develop wonderful interpersonal relationships with everyone.

When working in the criminal department, I was able to attend court with the Judge and the head criminal clerk. The court proceedings were mostly pre-trials, preliminary hearings, and status hearings. During the pre-trials and preliminary hearings, I got to experience litigation between defense attorney's and county prosecutors. It was interesting because the prosecutors weren't set on sending the defendant to jail, they were very open to cutting deals and seemed to want what was best for the individual.



I got the most hands-on experience when I was working in the traffic department. Our office would receive, via fax/email, dozens of tickets every Monday from the Sherriff's department that were issued in Santa Cruz County over the weekend. It was my job to input the tickets into the system, designate a case number for the ticket, and then price the ticket. I learned about many obscure traffic violations, and the difference between a civil traffic ticket, and a criminal traffic ticket.

The civil department was my favorite department to work in. I would go up to court for small claims hearings, forcible detainers, injunctions against harassment, and orders of protections. These hearings would last for hours so all of my time

spent in the civil department was in court. There were many wonderful and interesting experiences that I had the opportunity to witness or be a part of. One of those experiences that I will remember the most was a civil case. It was two injunctions against harassment, and one order of protection. All three of which were filed against the same man. The order of protection was the most interesting. The defendant (the man whom the order was filed against) had a lawyer, whereas the plaintiff did not. Both parties were allowed to call witnesses who had experienced the altercation or its aftermath. Two of the witnesses used by the plaintiff were the same two people who had filed the injunctions against harassment, which was interesting. During the cross examination, it disturbed me how the defense attorney would twist the witnesses and the plaintiffs words around. All three of them, in my opinion (which was later confirmed by the Judge's decision) were victims in the situation and they were being questioned as if they were in the wrong. It was really unsettling and hard to listen to and watch. It was clear that the defendant could care less about these people and was just a bully.



There were also instances where the lawyer was taking advantage of the fact that the plaintiff did not have counsel. At one point, the defendant's mother was testifying for her son, and the lawyer was clearly leading the witness, which, if the plaintiff had a lawyer, would be grounds for a granted objection from the Judge. I even asked the Judge afterwards about it and he confirmed.

The case showed me why most people think so badly of lawyers. I couldn't believe someone could defend that man, who physically, mentally, and emotionally abused an ex of his. The case also showed me that our Justice System is doing its job. The judge granted the order of protection, and the look of relief on the victim's face almost brought me to tears. He was so relieved that he can continue with his life and not have to worry about this man interfering with it, nor would he have to live in fear anymore. The law will do its job of protecting him.