UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO

Alumnus

SUMMER 1989

'Desire to Excel' Drives Two Top Law School Grads

By Mel Taylor

Law school graduates, a diverse bunch, often reach the top of their careers earlier than their counterparts in other professions. Perhaps the law attracts a higher percentage of fast trackers. Or, perhaps law is more segmentalized, allowing for a finer degree of specialization and stronger personal interest.

In any case, it's true that law school today prepares graduates for specialized careers that didn't exist even 10 years ago — entertainment law, political asylum law, nuclear waste disposal law, personality estate law, etc.

Patricia Byrne Duggan, '71, JD '75, and Saundra Brown Armstrong, JD '77, are USF Law School alumnae who have risen to the top of their respective fields because of their desire to excel personally and professionally.

The lives of these women lawyers, though very different, intersect at several interesting junctures. Byrne has been climbing Chevron's corporate ladder as a tax attorney for seven and one-half years. Her office is in the corporation's world headquarters in San Francisco. There are 37 lawyers in the giant company's tax department, five in her area of expertise — state, local and franchise taxes. In addition to her undergraduate and law degrees from USF, the fourth-generation San Franciscan holds a master of law and master of business administration from Golden Gate University, 10 blocks from her office.

Armstrong is a Superior Court judge for Alameda County. She is currently assigned to the juvenile division. The judge, named to the bench in January, has hopscotched through five positions involving areas of the law as varied as federal parole and product safety. Armstrong grew up in Oakland.

In addition to both growing up in the Bay Area, the two attended USF, worked as policewomen while in law school, are experienced in working with juveniles, and have put down their career roots in the San Francisco Bay Area.

They didn't start out sharing many similarities. Armstrong grew up in the predominately black inner-city neighborhood of East Oakland and attended Castlemont High School. Byrne graduated from St. John's Ursuline High School in San Francisco's Hispanic Mission District. Upon graduation, she entered the Ursuline Convent motherhouse in Santa Rosa in Sonoma County to become a nun.

It was the mid-'60s, and many students in Byrne's graduating class were entering service agencies like the Peace Corps. "Being young, I wanted to do my service, but mine was in the service of the Lord," Byrne said. "I was looking forward to teaching mathematics and science."

After three years in the convent, she came home because of an illness in the family, started to work at Pacific Telephone as a service representative and eventually decided not to return to the semi-cloistered order. "I saw other ways of helping," she said.

That's when she entered USF to study mathematics with Fr. John Fischer, S.J., now professor emeritus. "But there weren't many jobs available for statisticians when I graduated," Byrne recalls. Because many in her family worked for city agencies, she decided to take the policewoman's examination and, as luck would have it, there was a single opening.

She outscored everyone, was accepted for that one position, graduated at the top of her class (becoming the first woman to win the police academy's academic award), and went on to become San Francisco's first woman sergeant "but (I) chose not stay to become a lieutenant."

Saundra Brown Armstrong

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Byrne

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Armstrong

Patricia Byrne Duggan

Byrne started out on the narcotics detail, then moved to investigating child abuse cases, which took her to City Hall several times a week. She was soon spending much of her free time attending court cases.

"I had always enjoyed my law classes in the academy," Byrne said, "and eventually decided to go to law school." She graduated magna cum laude from USF and was awarded the Prentice Hall Tax Award and "Amjurs" (American Jurisprudence Award) in both contracts and torts.

But before receiving her degree, Byrne had decided she would be leaving the police force because advancement opportunities were limited. She said nine women were admitted to the department in 1946 "and I took the job of the one who retired. Women had not been allowed to take promotional tests until the '70s, and then things started to open up. Thankfully, a lot has changed since then."

Byrne believes women have advanced in most areas of employment, "but there is still less than full equality. Fewer women than men are in the upper echelons of business and industry. But advances are being made. When I was in law school, women made up 2 percent of the student body — now it's 50 percent. We have made steady advancements over the years."

Three years ago she married William (Bill) Duggan, '67, whose family has been in the mortuary business in San Francisco for more than 100 years. Her 14-year-old stepson attends St. Brendan's in San Francisco's Twin Peaks area and will attend St. Ignatius College Prep next fall. For relaxation, Byrne swims, hikes, skis and does aerobics.

Byrne was named the first woman president of the St. Thomas More Society last year. The 50-year-old organization of 300 Catholic lawyers was named after the diplomat who became England's highest judicial officer. Sir Thomas More was executed by Henry VIII for refusing to recognize the king as the supreme head of the church in England.

Byrne said she hopes her leadership of the organization, of which she is now a board member, will encourage other women to become active and take up their equal role as Catholic women lawyers "because being all three — a Catholic, woman, lawyer — is certainly a formidable challenge in this day and age."

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The time slots on Judge Saundra Brown Armstrong's daily calendar are filled with challenges: Tuesday afternoons — adoptions — a joyful time when the judge's Hayward courtroom lights up with the proud smiles and heartfelt congratulations of grandparents, supportive aunts, uncles, and cousins as new parents accept the charge of taking moral, legal and physical responsibility of their adopted children.

But on Wednesday morning that same courtroom becomes leaden, filled with the somber tones of prosecution and defense attorneys and social workers, police officers and psychologists who deal with the difficult issues of dependency — child abuse, molestation, abandonment.

On Thursday — juvenile crimes. "The kinds of crimes committed by juveniles have changed," Armstrong says. "The pervasive problem of drugs lies at the heart of many of the offenses. Children who have the same parents, and who are raised in the same way, often are as different as day and night. One may be strong enough to resist peer pressure, one may not."

As an appointee to the Alameda County Superior Court, Armstrong does hear other cases, but she is assigned to the juvenile division in Hayward, about 20 miles south of her hometown of Oakland.

"Juvenile law is a challenging assignment because there are extra considerations to be made," she says. "Our primary thought is rehabilitation, to intercede at a critical time, to do something to help turn the child around. We do not focus on retribution for the crime. Our job requires us to look for patterns in the child's life, to look at the extended family, other circumstances — what leads a 16-year-old to have a run-in with the police for the first time? What is going on in his or her world?"

At one time, Armstrong had been on the other side of the bench. She served as a policewoman on the Oakland Police Department while attending USF Law School in the evening. She started out conducting and coordinating investigations of child abuse and neglect, among other offenses. During her third year in school, she squeezed in a clerkship with former First District Court of Appeals Judge John B. Molinari, doing her clerking assignments on weekends.

"Law school was the first educational experience I thoroughly enjoyed," says Armstrong, who earned her undergraduate degree at California State University-Fresno. "While I was in law school, that was my priority. Every spare moment was left for studying." She graduated magna cum laude in the top 4 percent of her class.

The hard work paid off. She took a job with the Alameda County district attorney's office, but already had her sights set on becoming a judge. She served as a consultant to the California Committee on Criminal Justice in Sacramento to advise state legislators on the legal aspects of pending bills.

She then moved to Washington, D.C., with the Department of Justice's Public Integrity Section investigating charges of public corruption. Later she was appointed by President Ronald Reagan as vice chairman of the U.S. Consumer Products Safety Commission, where she focused on product safety for seniors.

After three years, Reagan appointed her commissioner to the U.S. Parole Commission in the western region headquartered in Belmont, Calif., 30 miles south of Oakland. At the commission, she was responsible for making all parole decisions on eligible federal prisoners, federal parolees and mandatory releases within the 14 western states. Her husband, whom she met in Sacramento and married in Washington, had since taken a position with an Oakland telecommunications company, so the move back was well-timed. The Armstrongs have two children.

"Influences on our children have changed a lot over the years," Armstrong says. "Role models are more important than ever because they can direct a child's aspirations. You don't aspire to something you don't see. That's why it's important to go back to the community where you got your start, to say 'this was my chair...I sat right here, like you and I wasn't born any richer or more fortunate.'

"I go to career days and visit with school administrators at my old high school. It's important for us to show our children that there are legitimate ways of accomplishing what they want to and, more importantly, to show them how to do it. I have my students call me at home. We all need to take time and let them know there are people out there they can ask. Otherwise, they grab at what's available. And too often, in today's society, it can be the wrong thing."

Super Bowl Winner Now Tackles Teaching at USF

Blaine Nye

After nine years in pro football, Blaine Nye now tackles teaching advanced corporate finance and managerial economics to USF MBA students.

From 1968-77, the 6-foot-5-inch Nye was an offensive guard for the Dallas Cowboys, Super Bowl winners in 1971 and 1977. Nye's personal triumphs included being named All-Pro by sportswriters in 1972 and selections to Pro Bowl teams in 1974 and 1976.

Nye's football career started at Servite High School in Anaheim, where he was a lineman and made All-League first teams. Because Nye didn't make the All-County first team, his coach thought Nye didn't live up to his potential. He made up for it in the classroom where he shined in math and science.

On combined academic and athletic scholarships, Nye, now 42, earned a bachelor's degree in physics from Stanford, where he also played tight end and defensive tackle. He was drafted by the Cowboys upon graduation.

During the off-season, Nye worked his mind as hard as his body. Hoping to teach, he earned a master's degree in physics from the University of Washington in Seattle.

Toward the middle of his playing career, Nye discovered that job opportunities for physics teachers were next to nil. He turned to business.

Nye earned an MBA from Stanford during four off-seasons and also worked as a corporate banking officer for Wells Fargo. He received his Ph.D in finance from Stanford after he retired from football.

Through an old friend, Gary Williams, dean of USF's business school, Nye heard about an opening at USF's McLaren College of Business. He has been professor of finance at USF since September 1988.

An outstanding performer in the athletic and academic worlds, Nye has sometimes been the object of curiosity. He says some persons ask, "How could you give up football?" Others ask, "Why did you waste all those years playing football?" Nye says, "These were just things I did. They really aren't that incompatible."

He dismisses stereotypes about "dumb jocks." "I know former football players who run the gamut from novelists to drug dealers — just like other people."

Nye also dismisses Proposition 103, the recently-passed controversial insurance initiative that would reduce all property and casualty insurance rates — not just auto insurance — to 20 percent less than November 1987 levels.

"Proposition 103 would bankrupt the insurance industry and bring personal grief to a lot of us," said Nye, who with two other persons was commissioned by the insurance industry to write a study on the proposition.

If the law is contested all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court and upheld, Nye predicts, "Ultimately, the courts will have to strike it down after a year or two of worsening grief."

While Nye forecasts a relatively quick end for Proposition 103, he sees a long-term stay for himself at USF. He calls the campus "nice and friendly with an excellent faculty and facilities."

Nye, a native of Ogden, Utah, was raised in Southern California and now lives in Menlo Park with his wife, Annabelle, and their four children.

— Marlon Villa

Furst Refuses to be Slowed by Retirement

On and on he goes, and what he'll come up with next, nobody knows.

That may well serve as the motto of Arthur Furst, professor emeritus. Though officially retired from USF in 1980, Furst, who was granted the special title of Distinguished University Professor, remains a whirlwind of activity.

Typically, if he's not doing lab work at USF, Furst is off around the world lecturing on cancer research and his newest subject — using earthworms as a replacement for laboratory animals.

A pioneer cancer researcher who began his teaching and research career at USF in 1942, Furst has contributed greatly to improvements made in cancer treatment. In 1952, he co-authored the first paper on the use of oral drugs in the battle against cancer. Up to that time, cancer patients would routinely be admitted to hospitals for intravenous therapy.

As a result of his success with oral drugs for cancer, Furst was offered and accepted a professorship at Stanford where he helped establish that university among the world's top cancer research facilities. He left Stanford to return to USF in 1960.

Furst performed some of his early USF research with the late Dr. Harold Harper. A bright undergradute student of theirs, Robert Seiwald, now a recently retired USF chemistry professor, published a paper in the prestigous *Archives of Biochemistry.* The journal rejects approximately nine of every 10 papers submitted.

Furst is also a world-renowned expert on the subject of metals that cause cancer. It was he who discovered that the high incidence of nasal and lung cancer among European nickel miners was caused by the nickel and not the arsenic it contained. In the 30 years since his research was concluded, the rate of lung cancer cases among European nickel miners has plummeted.

Furst's work with earthworms is proving to be very rewarding, although he admits that the worms cannot be used as a complete replacement for laboratory animals. Still, Furst takes pride in the fact that his research is productive and, at the same time, satisfies those opposed to using laboratory animals in cancer experiments.

Arthur Furst

In 1986, Furst was awarded the Klaus Schwarz Medal, presented by the International Association of Bioinorganic Scientists. The award was given primarily because of Furst's pioneering contributions in the field of metal carcinogenesis. In May, he addressed the annual meeting of the American Association for Cancer Research. In November, he will be the keynote speaker before the American College of Toxicology, which will honor him on the occasion of his 75th birthday.

Furst also serves as a consultant to federal agencies and other consulting groups hired by the federal government. In 1987, Furst was appointed by Congress to be the consultant to the Environmental Protection Agency on the Clean Water Act.

Furst spends no less than 30 percent of his time as a traveling lecturer. He recently concluded a trip to South Africa where he spoke before every major medical school. That trip saw him make 17 lectures in 13 days. He has also spoken to major corporate groups such as Shell Oil and other major industrial powers in the world.

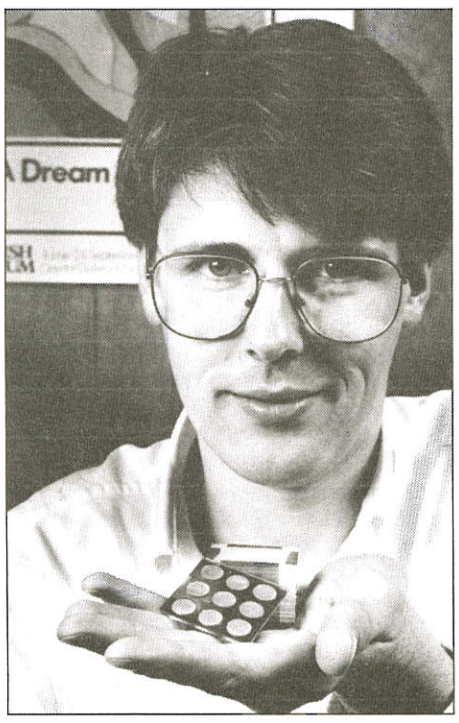
— Jim Muyo

Student Experiment Rides on Shuttle Discovery

This year, the work of Eric Benton '89, a physics student who once had trouble with math and science, has literally reached great heights.

A radiation measurement experiment Benton designed at the University flew aboard the space shuttle Discovery in March.

Benton's experiment, the result of nearly three years work, involved measuring the effect of radiation on plants that flew aboard the shuttle. In space, beyond the protective filtering of the atmosphere, radiation levels are higher than on Earth.



Eric Benton

Benton built two small plastic boxes and filled them with extremely thin two-inch by two-inch squares made of a special radiation sensitive plastic, CR-39. This plastic is a clearer, more refined version of the material used to make eyeglass lenses.

The boxes were placed near plants to detect radiation levels on the journey. The radiation particles in outer space, such as certain protons and atomic nuclei, leave minute "damage trails" in the sensitive plastic, Benton said.

The plastic is chemically treated to increase the size of the radiation trails so that they can be seen clearly through a high-powered microscope. The trails' pattern indicate the type and amount of radiation that exists beyond Earth's atmosphere.

Benton says final results from the experiment will take six months to determine. He doesn't expect to find "anything out of the ordinary" because of the short five-day duration of the trip.

But, he added, if test results show any abnormal amounts of radiation, that could warn of possible genetic alteration of the plants, the crew and other life on the shuttle.

Eric's father, Eugene Benton, 51, chairman of the physics department and director of the physics research lab, had his own experiment on board, a radiation detection badge worn by the astronauts and made of the same sensitive plastic his son used.

Eric, 24, attributes his interest in space radiation to the elder Benton. But, Eric said, he did poorly in math and science at Tamalpais High School in Mill Valley, Calif., "possibly as a reaction to my father." As a result, Eric then focused on English and philosophy, a subject that still greatly interests him.

At USF, Eric took a calculus course "because I had nothing better to do," after first having taken algebra again. His success with the class gave him the confidence to continue with math and the sciences. In addition, he said, physics is much like philosophy in that it asks big questions. Physics, however, has the advantage of having more precise answers. "Plus, it's a lot of fun."

The younger Benton is a recipient of the class of 1989's Dr. Raymond Genolio Award for the graduating senior in physics who ranks highest in scholarship. He will work six to 12 more months in the USF physics research lab and eventually get his graduate degrees in physics at either UC Berkeley or Stanford.

A resident of Mill Valley, Benton plans to teach physics, possibly at USF.

— Marlon Villa

USF ALUMNUS **VOLUME 4 NUMBER 2** **SUMMER 1989**

Publisher: Joy Moore, Director, Alumni Relations
Class Notes: Mark Roberts '79

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Managing Editor: Jim Muyo
Designer: Zelaya Designs

ALUMNUS is published quarterly by the University of San Francisco, Ignatian Heights, San Francisco, CA 94117-1080, (415) 752-6560, and mailed to all alumni at no charge. Third class postage paid at general mail facility, 1300 Evans Avenue, San Francisco, CA 94124.