

My name is Harrison Gothelf

My passion for the law started with my family. My great-grandfather, grandparents, my dad, and I would sit around the warped wooden table at my grandfather's house, talking about politics for hours. I remember first joining in when I was 10 at family parties. I could learn something from everyone, especially my great-grandpa and his stories about our family's immigration and the war. He was in his late 90s but would recall stories and headlines so vividly and in such detail, he was practically a docent at a museum. I would spend most of the time just listening and trying to follow along. But as I got older, I started participating at the table and in the classroom. I would take what I was learning in school and share it with my family, and use talks with my family in school. The best part about the table was that I knew I would gain a new perspective on whatever topic we were discussing. I learned how to treat people with respect, even when not agreeing with their specific view. As years passed, I felt more engaged in the talks, became more informed on the subjects, and continued to develop my own opinions. Now it's just my grandma, my dad, and me at the table. I have the responsibility of carrying on the talks and bringing new people to the table. I believe the law is the best way to do it. Being able to protect families who may not understand their freedoms from injustice can start these talks for generations. But being able to get started on this path is not easy. I don't have a large family full of lawyers. My parents, grandparents, and aunts have all dedicated their lives to teaching and shaping the next generation, including me and my sisters. Growing up in that environment instilled in me a deep respect for knowledge and the responsibility that comes with sharing ideas with others. Education was never just encouraged, but expected to be purposeful and long-lasting. Through my upbringing, I developed a curiosity about the law and the systems that shape it. I have had opportunities to explore different places, visit places of history, and hear different perspectives.

Whether I was climbing inside the literal attic Anne Frank hid in, in Amsterdam, or going through the Chicago History Museum for the 20th time, learning about the history each of these places held pushed me to ask questions, research, and engage in discussions with others. Like my conversations at the table and the expectation from my family, knowledge like that was not meant to be kept to myself. While my actions were absolutely influenced by my family's expectations, it also reflects my own belief that informed individuals have a responsibility to contribute to their communities. Law, at its core, operates in the same way. It depends on the ability to interpret, communicate, and apply knowledge in ways that impact others. Using the law, you have the chance to help people who don't have the knowledge you have, applying it to help someone in any aspect of their life. The way the law can resolve conflict, prevent problems, and shape opportunities for people is the foundation my interest in the law is built off of. So being in a field where critical thinking, communication, and a commitment to understanding different perspectives are not only valued but required is something that I need to be a part of.