

NATIONAL

Paralegal Reporter®

Summer 2016 - Volume 41 Number 2

NFPA - The Leader of the Paralegal Profession®

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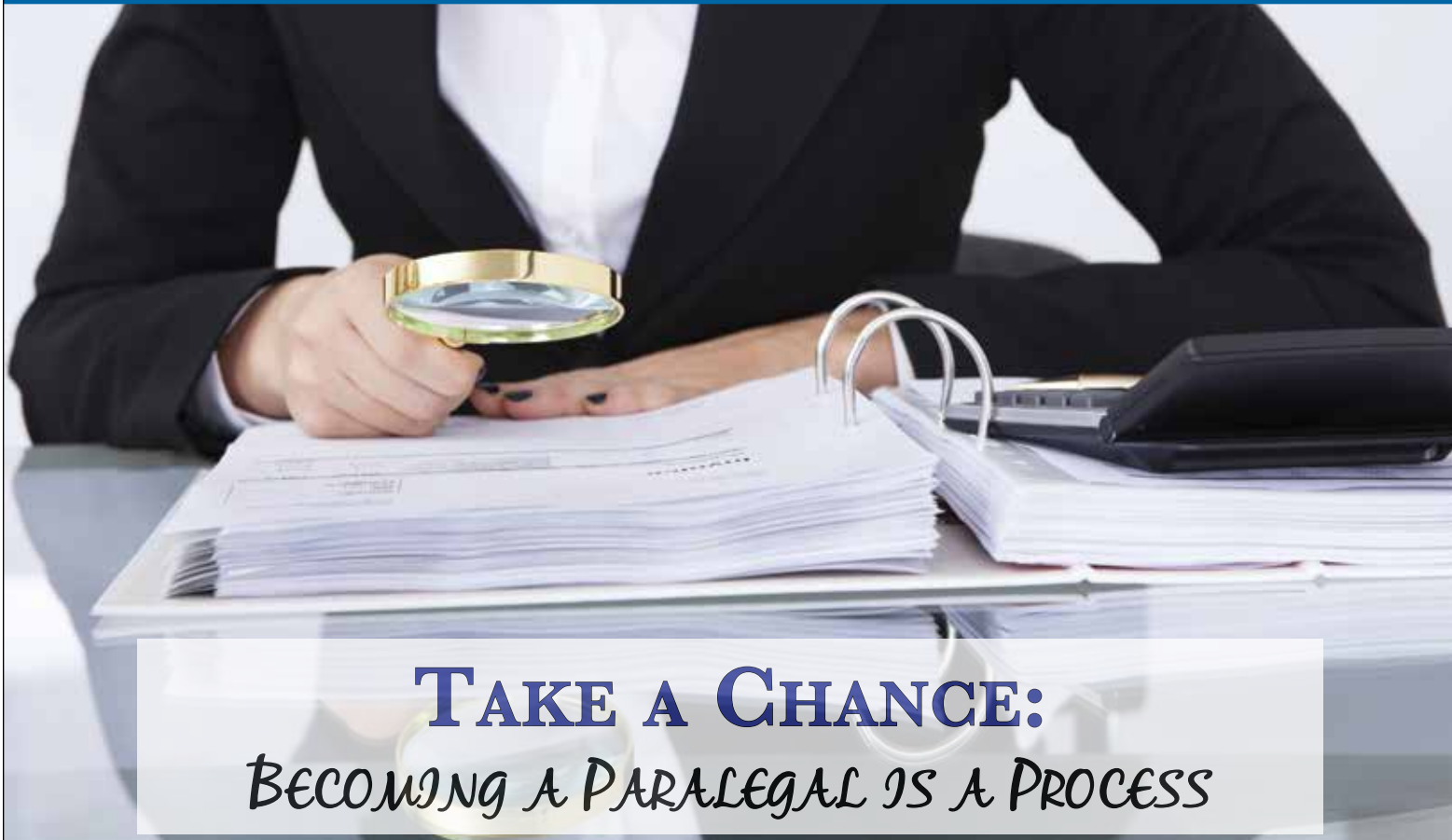


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TAKE A CHANCE: *BECOMING A PARALEGAL IS A PROCESS*

BY JANICE H. FRARY, CRP

I didn't think it was in my DNA to gamble, take risks, or cross the comfort line — boy was I wrong!

In 2007, I was a seemingly feeble 20-something year old sitting in an attorney's office for the first time in my life. I was scared, pregnant, dirt poor, and starting the divorce process. It's not exactly where I'd imagined myself after graduating from a university with honors, but there I was. I picked this attorney because a friend recommended him. He happened to be a District Judge at the time and practiced family law privately.* Honestly, sitting across from him scared the mess out of me. He said all sorts of things that day, very nicely, but I heard almost none of it. I scrounged up what little I had, which included my birthday savings, and started the process.

LEARNING TO BE A PARALEGAL

We went through the divorce and custody process like most cases — I was emotional, scared, and legally-uneducated; he was calm, cool, and beyond knowledgeable. Then, while we were sitting in the waiting room waiting to enter my first custody conference, everything changed. I

had spent weeks preparing documents, spreadsheets, and visuals to help with the hearing and placed them all inside of a binder. It wouldn't be me if the binder wasn't complete with tabs and a table of contents. He stopped, looked at me, looked at the binder, and said "Wow. Do you want a job?"

From that point on, I was his part-time legal assistant. I worked harder than I admitted. I started with very simple case and office organization tasks, and as I learned, he challenged me more. He'd ask me to prepare a document, and I'd spend time looking through past files figuring it out. I learned our county's Local Rules inside out and backwards. I'd read legal books, ask lots of questions to anyone who would answer, and Google legal jargon I didn't understand. I'd try to prepare my own case documents as practice. After all, if I was going to mess up, it might as well be my case. I did all this while simultaneously working my day job at a police department, navigating a divorce, and being a mom of two.

This continued for six years; police admin by day, legal admin by night. It worked for me. I was comfortable, and

of course, when you are comfortable, that's when the floor falls out from under you. Our police department cut its force in half. After ten years, there I was at a meeting to help save the police officers' jobs, when I publically learned that I had just been laid off. That hurt.

STARTING A NEW PATH

My parents always taught me to work hard and that anything less isn't an option. When faced with this new challenge, I knew exactly what I needed to do. It was time to make my legal assisting a certified reality. I wanted to become an official Paralegal and start my own business. There was no better time for this ginormous leap, so I jumped.

I purchased the PCCE books and registered for the test immediately so I had a deadline. I spent weeks preparing, which included endless days at the library studying with flashcards — it was college all over again (minus the freedom and fun)! I was going to do this. And I did. I passed with flying colors and my excitement was of lottery-winning equivalent.

STARTING A BUSINESS

In October of 2014 I started my own business. I began working for myself, but I still worked for the one attorney who gave me a chance. That will never change. However, I've added on others. I'm putting my skills to work for those attorneys that need paralegal assistance, but do not have the money, or need, to hire full-time help. I'm a virtual paralegal. I work mostly from my home office, performing all of the tasks that normally occur in an office, just without any overhead for the attorney. I can work as little or as much for each attorney, based on their needs. You'd be surprised at how many attorneys benefit from this arrangement. I am so fortunate to work for many attorneys in many practice areas in the greater Philadelphia and Lehigh Valley

regions. It's the most fun I've ever had because each day is different and challenging. It's been a year and a half since I started, and I've tripled in size, added numerous independent contractors to help with various projects, and expanded my contact base beyond my wildest imagination.

I've had quite a few people ask how they can become paralegals. My advice — jump in. Start somewhere; start at the bottom; work your way up; learn from everyone; never stop learning. You aren't going to wake up one day a paralegal. It took me years to get here, and I'll never stop learning - but that's what fuels me. I want to keep learning, keep moving, and keep challenging myself. Never, ever give up, and never stop moving forward.

Today, my office proudly displays my college degree and paralegal certification. Not for vanity by any stretch, but for a reminder of how hard I worked to get to where I am today. One person took a chance on me. I took a chance on me. Take a chance on yourself.

Janice H. Frary, CRP, is the owner of Virtual Paralegal and Administrative Services LLC. She holds her Bachelor's Degree in Criminology from the University of Florida and is a 6-time national award winning event planner. She has two wonderful children, is now happily remarried with two bonus step-children, and lives near Allentown, Pennsylvania. To learn more, visit her online at www.virtualparalegalpa.com.



David A. Keightly, Sr. is the amazing attorney who gave me a chance and opportunity at a time when there wasn't much hope. Please learn more about him and his practice at www.keightly.com.