

I've been privileged enough to work with many of you and I know that there are many clinical students who are just as deserving of this award. I respect and adore so many people in this room and words can't adequately express how humbled I am to share this incredible honor with all of you.

Thank you to the Sax family and to the Prize Committee for this award. I'm so honored to be a part of this Berkeley Law tradition that memorializes Brian Sax's enthusiasm for the practice of law.

I also want to thank my girlfriend, Nila. She doesn't like when I say this, but it's the truth: she's the best thing I have going for me.

I'm grateful that my parents were able to make the trip to share today with me. My dad was an attorney and I got the legal bug from him. That being said, I wouldn't be up here today if it wasn't for the work ethic my mom instilled in me.

I don't encourage anyone to do this, but if you ask my parents about what I was like as a child, the short answer is that they'll tell you I was strange. Case in point, a time capsule assignment of mine from 1996. I was nine and I had to answer fifteen questions about my life at that time. I'll own up to the fact that my favorite song was Shania Twain's "Any Man of Mine," but the really scary answer was what I wrote next to the "dream job" question: lawyer. I knew I wanted to be a lawyer in the third grade.

When I started at Berkeley Law three years ago, I don't think I knew much more about what being a lawyer meant than I did when I was nine. At the end of my first year, I felt like I had made a mistake. I didn't know how to answer my mom's questions about what type of law I wanted to practice or what I wanted to do with my life. I finally knew what a tort was, but I hadn't found people who looked like the lawyers that I always envisioned being.

It wasn't until I started at the East Bay Community Law Center for my 1L summer that I finally found those people, Eliza Hersh and Jesse Hsieh, the lawyers I envisioned being. Every Monday, I went to Hayward with Jesse. Clients came in with their RAP sheets and I'd look them over to see which clean slate remedies were available.

It was uplifting when I could tell a client that the misdemeanor conviction from twenty years ago that was holding her back from getting a job was eligible for a mandatory dismissal. I could fill a form out for her, file it across the street that day, and in a few weeks, that misdemeanor that had followed my client for the last twenty years, would be dismissed by the very court that convicted her.

It was exhilarating when I was in Alameda County court with Eliza and would stand in front of the judge with my client by my side. The look on a man's face when he learns that the judge has terminated his probation early so that he can enlist in the United States Army and in his own words, "be a role model for his sons," is unforgettable. The tears and relief that wash over a survivor's face when a judge

removes the erroneous domestic violence arrest from her record is indescribable. These experiences made me feel like for the first time in my life I was doing something that mattered.

Those moments of joy were accompanied with moments of desperation. It was heartbreaking when I felt like there was little to nothing I could do for a client. I remember meeting with a man during my first month at EBCLC. He had recently been released from prison and was struggling to find a job because employers wouldn't look past his criminal record. When a person goes to prison in California, the conviction that sent the person to prison can never be dismissed. The only remedy, a Certificate of Rehabilitation, is one that is difficult to obtain. All the hope in my client's eyes disappeared when I told him that it would be at least seven years before he would even be eligible for a Certificate of Rehabilitation. I didn't have an answer when he asked me why the state wanted to keep punishing him. He left angry, and rightfully so; he came to Hayward with hope and left completely disappointed.

What I appreciated most about my time at EBCLC is that Jesse and Eliza taught me how to be the best advocate I could be in those moments of desperation. I can't change every law that disenfranchises my clients, but I can show my clients the respect they deserve. I can listen.

I learned to redefine success and this ability made my work in the Death Penalty Clinic possible. It's difficult when you know your client's likely best case scenario is life without the possibility of parole. To say that working in the Death Penalty Clinic can be emotionally taxing is an understatement.

The Clinic experienced inexplicable loss this year and though nothing I can say makes what happened any less painful, I must say that Kate, Chris and Jolene's dedication continually inspires me. James's ability to meet ridiculous filing deadlines has been remarkable. Katherine, Mary, and Nicki made countless trips that involved knocking on doors to get interviews that mattered and, though I think Lis Semel was involved in this, breaking fences to get to those doors. Though Kiva and Lien didn't bring snacks to case rounds, they helped Lis prepare for an oral argument in front of a less than inviting California Supreme Court. Finally, I'm going to group my team, which includes Allie, Alana, Michelle and Rachel with Dave, Yanin, Micah, and Leila's group, because we all, somehow, found a way to make sense of cases new to the clinic. I have immense respect for all of you. We are a dysfunctional family, but we are a family.

Last August, I expected that my experience in the Death Penalty Clinic would be rewarding. I didn't expect that it would take me to Montgomery, Alabama after graduation. For multiple reasons [I'm gay], the last place I saw myself ever living was in the Deep South. I blame Ty Alper for all of this. But in all seriousness, that's what's great about the clinical experience at Berkeley Law. It gave me the opportunity to grow and to learn to be the advocate that I always envisioned being.

The clinical experience might not factor into law school rankings, but the clinics at Berkeley Law bring public interest students here and keep us here; after we suffer through the debacle that is 1L year, the clinics remind us why we came to law school. Berkeley Law needs to invest in the clinics as much as it invests in factors that matter to the rankings. It's not a number, but the advocates in this room, that make Berkeley Law relevant to public interest students. It's the people in this room that made a lasting impact on my legal education, and more importantly, my life. Thank you again to the Sax family and to all of you.