

Oh, the places I've been and the friends I've made...

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As I sit on a sunny morning in West Palm Beach to write my blog post, I'm thinking about the reasons why I love our Section and how I came to know so many of you. I'm also giving thanks for the experiences we have enjoyed together and all the beautiful places we have been.

I joined the ABA when I was a law student at the University of Miami School of Law. I didn't really know what the ABA was, just that it was free to law students and you joined. What could I lose, and who knew I would gain so much? I went to law school to become an environmental lawyer, so it made sense to join the Section of Environment, Energy, and Resources. (Back then it was known as SONREEL—Section of Natural Resources, Energy, and Environmental Law.) The Section provided our law school with its first meaningful environmental speaker, an EPA lawyer, Roosevelt Childress, who described working for the agency in Atlanta and our state's water quality issues. This talk cemented my decision—I was sold on environmental law. Fast forward a few years, and there I was, working with Mr. Childress on behalf of a client; such is the connected world of an environmental attorney!

My next encounter with the Section was as a young lawyer at our Section's Region 4 Conference in Atlanta where everyone who was anyone in our region participated in candid discussions about the environmental issues our states faced. It was a glorious experience to be surrounded by people speaking my language, sharing different viewpoints, and engaging in focused discussions about the things that concerned me and my clients.

And then in October 2002, I stepped into my first Section Fall Conference, that year located in Portland, Oregon. My friend Dana Bivins Brown invited me and made me feel welcome—introducing me to everyone she knew there including such illustrious peeps as Karen Mignone, Bill Penny, John Milner, Sheila Hollis, Lee DeHihns, Larry Caster, and Sara Beth Watson. I was five months pregnant with our first child, Hope, and came back from that conference as a committee vice chair. It was an incredible opportunity for a young environmental attorney—the energy, the knowledge, the new friendships, our journey to Mount Hood. That was the start of my love affair with the Section. I kept coming back for more; more knowledge, more friendships, more experiences. I don't think I have turned down a single Section request since. I've always said yes to a chance to face new challenges, meet incredible people, and learn more!

That first Fall Conference in Portland was 17 years ago and I really haven't looked back. I haven't had to, there was always another Section adventure waiting for me, always something to look forward to. Sitting here at home in lockdown for the past 10 weeks I have been looking back, smiling as I remember the fun I have had traveling to Section meetings throughout the country, and sometimes beyond, discussing everything under the sun, staying up late, and making friends. Along the way, I received a bonus education on good wine and meeting people from all over the world, learning about challenges in other states and countries and about other people's energy, environmental, and resource practices.

As we cope with the new reality of social isolation, I am heartened to see your faces, hear your voices, and be introduced to your homes through the magic of Zoom meetings. I know we will make it through this pandemic, but I can hardly wait to be back at in-person meetings, to give and get hugs, to chat with old friends, make new ones, and bring in new members who will be future friends. This Section has given me a beautiful window into America and its absolute wonderfulness through of each of you. Thank you, Michelle.