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I saw and continue to see law as a way of problem solving that has served me well in my work in both the public and private sectors.”

Sarah Morgenthau

Litigation Associate, 1991-96 (New York)

Life in public service for Sarah Morgenthau has spanned the Peace Corps, the SEC, the Department of Homeland Security and pure politics, and working on the Obama presidential campaign. Today she draws on her legal skills and her experience in government in her role as a Managing Director and head of the Washington, D.C. office of the global investigations firm Nardello & Co.

Sarah Morgenthau felt the call to public service from an early age. It was certainly in her genes. “My grandfather was Secretary of Treasury under FDR and my great grandfather was Ambassador to the Ottoman Empire under Woodrow Wilson. My uncle was U.S. attorney in the Southern District of New York and then D.A. for Manhattan for 30 years, so I got to work in the D.A.’s office one summer while still in college, which was a real formative experience. I witnessed state-level criminal trials and that really whet my appetite for law school and litigation.”

Fresh out of Columbia Law School and having started at Curtis as a first-year in 1991, Sarah was quick to realize how her legal skills could be harnessed to help people. “The commitment of Peter Fleming and his team to his clients, no matter what they might have done, was second to none. I worked on a wide range of litigation matters and realized I loved being in the courtroom.” She vividly recalls working with Peter Fleming, Ben Preziosi, Mark O’Donoghue, Barry Kingham, Eliot Lauer, Michelle Rice and Nancy Delaney.

An African sculpture of a man with a pipe was a gift to Sarah from an early *pro bono* client, a young political asylum seeker, and remains a cherished memento. “Turner Smith, a litigation partner at Curtis, assigned me to the case. The experience woke me up to the fact that my developing legal skills could make a real difference.” Sarah was no stranger to the struggles on the continent; her mother, a refugee from Nazi Austria, was an early pioneer and advocate for aid to Africa.

Sarah left Curtis to clerk for a newly appointed federal judge and looks back on this as a tipping point in her career.

“Judge Joseph A. Greenaway, Jr. was one of the younger judges and so, in a way, we learned together. As a litigation associate, I had tended to focus on certain aspects of a case. Writing opinions for a judge was the opposite – it meant taking a holistic view. We would produce a first draft and he would give feedback on it.”

A stint in the Enforcement Division at the SEC followed.

Sarah, by now a young mother, held one of the early job shares in the organization – not so common in the 1990s.

Politics took over when she worked on the 2005-6 Newark mayoral campaign for Cory Booker, now a U.S. Senator.

“I was organizing lawyers for election monitoring in Newark, as part of ensuring a fair and honest process and ultimately became the campaign’s scheduler. I heard Barack Obama speaking during that time and was captivated, so when I got a call in early 2007 to get involved on the finance side, I jumped at the opportunity.”

“In 2007, the presumed frontrunner was Hillary Clinton and the female vote was key to getting out the vote. There was a lot of interest from new people who wanted to get involved and the campaign was innovative about how it communicated with them. Obama was one of the first presidential campaigns with a clear digital strategy, and also operating in

a 24/7 news schedule.

Alongside policy discussions, we focused on the female perspective – explaining why women should support Barack Obama rather than Hillary.” Such thinking paid off, and Sarah ended up being the Obama campaign state director for New Jersey. Then-candidate Barack Obama called her personally to thank her for her contribution after the first event she organized for him turned out to be one of his most successful fundraisers. She joined the National Finance Committee, where she found herself one of very few women who wasn’t part of a “Mr & Mrs” deal.

With a family move to Washington, D.C. in 2008, Sarah joined the Obama administration as a political appointee at the Peace Corps.

She headed the Peace Corps Response, which was created in the 1990s to provide short-term, high-impact assistance to developing countries from highly skilled volunteers for shorter periods than the traditional postings. She remains proud of her role in launching the Global Health Service Partnership, a Peace Corps program that sent doctors and nurses to medical and nursing schools and hospitals in sub-Saharan Africa, to train the next generation of African doctors. The program was prescient, with the Ebola crisis hitting West Africa just two years later, exposing the lack of trained health care professionals on the ground. She looks back on it with grim satisfaction: “It was exactly the kind of program that needed to be built in the country at that time.” While in Tanzania, she got a call from Jeh Johnson, with whom she had served on the

National Finance Committee for Obama. He was about to become Secretary of the Department for Homeland Security (DHS). He invited her to join the department.

“At DHS, we were dealing with constant bad news, reacting to a steady stream of disasters that touched on the 22 agencies at the Department – TSA, Coast Guard, FEMA, Secret Service, CBP, ICE, USCIS, to name a few.” She held two positions there, Executive Director of the Homeland Security Advisory Council and Deputy Assistant Secretary for the Private Sector.

“I worked on a wide range of issues, including international and domestic terrorism, cybersecurity and immigration. I visited immigration detention facilities in Arizona and heard things from all sides. I got to meet some extraordinary men and women protecting our borders and witnessed firsthand the hardships endured by the immigrant community. My legal expertise once again allowed me to understand the issues raised by the lawyers representing migrants and advocacy groups.”

Like many, she thought Hillary Clinton would win the 2016 U.S. presidential election.

“I was getting a strong indication from those in the Obama administration that I would be in, so I woke up November 9 very shocked and like many others, in need of a new job.” Her next step was accepting a role at the elite global investigations firm Nardello & Co, where she is now an MD and head of the Washington, D.C. office. “One of the most positive

outcomes of the 2016 presidential election is the rise of women in leadership roles – unafraid to show our competitive side. The *#MeToo* movement has impacted the legal profession and investigations in a good way. It's shown firms the value of senior women – clients want to see them – and women are seeing the value in doing business together.”

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