



# LWI LIVES

Page I

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**In this issue:**

Profiles	Page
Irina Gott	I-3
Katrina Lee	I, 4-5
Denitsa Mavrova Heinrich	I, 6-8
LWI Lives Committee	9

*LWI Lives* is a regular electronic publication of the “Faces of LWI” Committee, which explores and communicates the emerging identity of LWI and its members. We have in common the commitment to being the best legal writing professors that we can be. But we are multi-dimensional people with different strengths, interests, curiosities, and gifts. By profiling individuals in our community, we hope to expand and develop our understanding of who we are and what we aspire to be.

## Irina Gott: Sage on the (Real) Stage



By Dyane O’Leary

Professor Irina Gott at Roger Williams Law School in Rhode Island avoids being the dreaded sage on the stage in her interactive first-year Legal Practice course. But outside of school, the stage is all hers.

*(Continued on page 2)*

## The Daily Practice of Katrina Lee



By Alexa Z. Chew

Several years ago, Katrina Lee and I spent a day together at a legal writing conference chatting about the full span of the usual things—the presentations, teaching, scholarship, status, our respective legal writing programs, and diversity.

*(Continued on page 4)*

## Denitsa Mavrova Heinrich: A Life Filled with Journeys



By Nancy Soonpaa

From a small village in Bulgaria to that country’s capital city of Sofia to cities in Minnesota, North Dakota, and Florida, Denitsa Mavrova Heinrich has experienced journeys that have shaped and defined her education and her life.

*(Continued on page 6)*

**Contributors to this Edition:**

Alexa Chew  
Dyane O’Leary  
Rebecca Rich  
Nancy Soonpaa

## Irina Gott

(Continued from page 1)

Born Irina Nirshberg in Kiev, the capital city of Ukraine, Irina came to the United States in 1979 as a young girl with her parents looking for greater opportunity and religious freedom. Her parents started from scratch and settled in New Haven, Connecticut. Together as a family, they learned English, and Irina's parents built successful careers in civil engineering while eventually helping the rest of the family (aunt, uncles, grandparents) emigrate to the United States as well. Irina, who remains conversant in Russian today, learned English while playing on the kindergarten playground and started dance lessons and participating in theater as a young elementary school student in suburban Connecticut.

Irina majored in English at the University of Connecticut, with a growing inkling that law school just might be her path. This was, of course, much to her parents' delight. Indeed, it was the precise type of opportunity they imagined upon making the decision to come to the United States—lawyers were always regarded with prestige and honor within the Russian community. Irina worked in PR and advertising for several years during and after college. It was during this time that Irina's career on the stage also flourished. Building on her love of song and dance, she performed in several productions with the University of Connecticut Repertory Theater and continued participating in many community theater performances after graduating.



Irina and her husband Ryan atop the Schilthorn summit in the Bernese Alps of Switzerland



Irina with her children Aaron (11) and Abby (14)

Set more than ever in her decision to pursue a career in law, Irina moved to Boston and enrolled at Suffolk University Law School. Some students use the first day of law school orientation to buy their books or memorize their schedule; Irina used it to say hello to the man who sat in front of her. Little did she know that fellow first-year Ryan Gott would become her husband. During law school, Irina pursued a general civil litigation track, which led her to the large Boston law firm of Testa, Hurwitz & Thibault and, a couple of years later, a small general firm in suburban Boston where she handled cases in the estate, employment, and contract areas. And looking back, Irina has no trouble remembering the year each of her children was born, 2004 and 2007—for the New England sports fan, those happen to be the first and second “break the curse” Boston Red Sox baseball championships since 1918!

When asked about her most memorable practice moment, Irina's answer is telling—it's not a fancy federal court trial or an “all-nighter” document review or far away travel for an exciting deposition. It's a small moment with one person who benefitted from Irina's passion for using her law degree to help others. Irina and her team undertook a complicated pro bono representation of a woman from the Democratic Republic of Congo with a tragic personal story that included a devastating separation from her three children. Irina worked to achieve a grant of asylum and, years later, helped locate and welcome the client's children to the United States in an emotional reunion at the airport.

## Irina Gott

(Continued from page 2)



That passion to help others soon made its way into the classroom. Determined to get out from behind the desk and put her law degree to a different use, Irina's first teaching position was in an undergraduate freshman English class at Suffolk University. On Day 1, she knew the classroom was where she needed to be. For several years, Irina was an adjunct or visiting professor at New England School of Law, Northeastern University School of Law, and Suffolk University Law School. Then, she landed at Roger Williams in the quintessential coastal city of Bristol, Rhode Island in 2016, where she is currently a Professor of Legal Practice teaching three sections of the first-year required legal practice course. Roger Williams is a small law school, with a first-year entering class in 2018 of approximately 175 students. According to Irina, the small learning environment creates an intimate one: judges, local practitioners, and faculty are always interacting with the student body, and Irina has the opportunity for dedicated, one-on-one focus as to each of her students. Between juggling private practice with a new teaching career (not to mention raising two children), Irina's passion for performance took somewhat of a back seat over the past decade. Not for long . . .

In recent years, Irina enjoys performances in the classroom *and* on the stage—whether in a dramatic play such as *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (she played Nurse Ratched) or energetic musical such as *A Chorus Line* (she starred as Sheila) or a fun comedy (she will star as Florence Unger in a female version of *The Odd Couple* next year), Irina has returned her talents to the MMAS Black Box Theater, a local arts center in Mansfield, MA, near her suburban Boston home. What's more, after grading memos and correcting research and citation exercises, she now enjoys watching other family members perform: her daughter participates in a competitive dance team and attends an overnight theater camp (indeed, Irina and her daughter performed together in a local production of *Annie* a few years ago), her son balances a perhaps unique combination of interests in both flag football and tap dancing, her parents enjoy competitive ballroom dancing in their retirement years, and her brother-in-law is a professional ballroom dancer, as well.

All in all, Irina has found two stages on which to display her personal and professional passion. Although she hasn't returned to Russia since the day she left as a little girl, she credits her parents for all of those important life lessons that have led her down her successful path: overcoming challenge, seeking out opportunity, motivating to do better, and discovering the many small sources of enjoyment in life that make it all worthwhile.

To get in touch with Irina, you can contact her at [igott@rwu.edu](mailto:igott@rwu.edu).



Irina in her star role!

## Katrina Lee

(Continued from page 1)

But it was sitting in the lobby of a YMCA-residence-turned-commercial-hotel, deciding which app to use to get to the airport, that our conversation went beyond the “usual” things. Instead of flying home to her husband and daughters in Ohio, she was flying to San Francisco to visit her father, who had been battling cancer for a year. He was dying. And in some dark leather chairs, waiting for an Uber, she told me about his illness, and her closeness with him, and the ache in her heart.

Katrina was born and raised in San Francisco, where her father was a public schoolteacher for thirty-five years. She describes her family as supportive and loving, borne out by her frequent trips home to be with her parents and sister during her father’s intensive chemotherapy. Even though she returned to California as often as every two weeks during his illness, she missed only one class—when her father passed away. This might sound like the setup for a *Lean In* anecdote, but it isn’t. As she explained, “I kept teaching while my dad was ill, not because I had to, but because I knew my dad wanted me to.”

When Katrina was growing up, her father taught full-time at a local high school and, for supplementary income, in the evenings in a community college program, possibly never missing a single day in his thirty-five-year career. As Katrina put it, “he always went to work.” But he elected not to teach summer school, passing up critical income, so that he could spend the summers with his young daughters.

Her father died in 2016, and Katrina honors him by emulating him: she works hard to be present with her two daughters, and she teaches her heart out. Every day.



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Katrina and her daughters at the University of Oxford Botanic Garden in 2017. Katrina taught Business Negotiations in a Global Environment at the University of Oxford in summer 2017



A distinguished panel at the Ohio Statehouse in November 2018: Katrina, her husband Dennis Bong, and their daughters Sabrina (11) and Phoebe (9).

She has taught first-year legal writing at the Ohio State’s Moritz College of Law since 2011. And in the past eight years, she’s expanded her teaching portfolio to include the Business of Law and Legal Negotiations in Moritz’s nationally recognized Dispute Resolution program. She created and leads the LL.M. Legal Writing program, serving as its inaugural director. Teaching LL.M. students in particular has given her a lot to bring to her other courses. The students hail from all over the globe, and they all come to her classroom with different levels of lawyering experience and different cultural and language backgrounds. As they work through the norms of U.S. legal communication, they in turn use their perspectives as lawyers practicing in other countries to share how they react to and process those norms.

In all of her courses, she emphasizes well-being and personal connection. She meets frequently with her students in one-on-one meetings. This is

## Katrina Lee

(Continued from page 4)



Katrina and her daughters on the rooftop of the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford, also in summer 2017

ship. For example, she has written about the connection between mindfulness and technology as well as how mindfulness meditation can help increase creativity and reduce racial bias. She also wove it throughout her book about the business of law, *The Legal Career: Knowing the Business, Thriving in Practice* (West). *The Legal Career* includes reflection questions and activities designed to help law students explore what it means to be healthy lawyers and how to be change agents in the profession.

After twelve years in practice and nearly eight in the legal academy, Katrina has grown “increasingly motivated by the frustrating slowness of progress on diversity in the legal profession.” A trudging pace that “infects everything: poor people and minorities not receiving quality legal representation, who gets to have power and lead in our local communities and nationally, who gets paid more, who is easily dismissed in little and big ways in our institutions.” She can run down a list of “too many”—conference rooms and courtrooms in which she has been the only woman lawyer, the only minority lawyer, or the only woman of color lawyer; law firms that don’t have a woman of color on their executive or compensation committees; law schools that don’t have sufficiently diverse student bodies or faculty.

These are big problems without easy solutions, but Katrina has suggestions. And, no surprise, they require constant attention, a daily practice of considering diversity and inclusion in our everyday choices: planning classes, selecting conference speakers and articles for publication, assigning (or not) tables at gala dinners. And just as we advise our students to, we should honestly and openly reflect on how those choices worked. If they didn’t produce our desired results, we should make different choices. The daughter and granddaughter of immigrants, Katrina sees her work on diversity “as a way to serve and help make progress on an issue that has lingered way too long. And to help open doors to unbounded opportunity for [her] daughters and their peers and the generations after them.”

To get in touch with Katrina, you can contact her at [katrinalee@osu.edu](mailto:katrinalee@osu.edu).



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teaching time that Katrina especially cherishes—the “most treasured” part of “one of the best jobs in the world.” Her affection for individual conferences is not so surprising considering her past life as a partner at a national law firm who ran her office’s summer associate program and carved out the time to mentor junior associates while also representing huge companies in litigation. She offers her students some of the same advice she offered her junior attorneys: “Look after your well-being. Always. You take better care of your clients when you take better care of yourself. Check in with yourself every day. Every. Single. Day. Ask yourself, what are my priorities? Am I happy with what I’m doing? Your priorities, and what makes you happy, may change. You owe it to yourself to monitor them.”

To monitor her own well-being, Katrina practices yoga and mindfulness meditation. If you’re on Twitter, you might have seen her tweets from the Southeastern Association of Law Schools (SEALS) conferences in past years about the morning yoga sessions for attendees and their families. Mindfulness is also a part of her negotiations curriculum and her scholar-

### Top Five Books that Katrina Has Read in the Past Five Years

1. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, *Americanah*
2. Min Jin Lee, *Pachinko*
3. Paul Kalinithi, *When Breath Becomes Air*
4. Lin-Manuel Miranda and Jeremy McCarter, *Hamilton The Revolution*
5. Amy Krouse Rosenthal and Tom Lichtenheld, *I Wish You More* (children’s book)

## Denitsa Mavrova Heinrich

(Continued from page 1)

As a tenure-track professor at the University of North Dakota School of Law, she has found a new home far away from the one where she started.

Denitsa was born and raised in Bulgaria. Under the Bulgarian educational system, students may take entrance exams after seventh grade and apply to specialized high schools, such as schools with an intensive focus on foreign languages, math, or sciences. Her plan was to attend a high school specializing in the classical languages and arts. Through the encouragement of some family friends, however, she also decided to take the entrance exam for a new school that had just reopened its doors for the first time the year before—the American College of Sofia.

The College is one of the oldest American educational institutions outside the United States. It was first opened in 1861 but was forced to close during World War II, with its campus and equipment confiscated by the government in 1947. After the fall of the Communist regime in Bulgaria in November 1989 and with the support of alumni, the College opened its doors again in 1992, admitting 50 boys and 50 girls (about 2,700 seventh graders applied). She was fortunate enough to be among one of the students admitted to the College the following year. And so, at the age of 13, she packed her bags and made the journey from a small village in the province to the nation's capital, Sofia.

The mission of the College was “to provide Bulgarian youth with the best possible education, including fluency in English, and to instill in them high standards of morality and integrity.” Denitsa spoke no more than a few words of English when she arrived (although she had studied Russian and French in elementary and middle school).

She still remembers the language placement interview before the beginning of the school year. It went something like this:



Denitsa with former UND trial team students at UND's Carrigan Cup

Q: What's your name?

A: My name is Denitsa.

Q: How old are you?

A: I'm 13 years old.

Q: [some undecipherable words in English]

A: I don't speak any English.

As a parent today, Denitsa marvels that her parents trusted her, at age 13, to move out of the house and live on her own—but she is so glad they did. While she recalls not fully realizing it at the time (she admits going through a “rebellious teenage” phase), it was the education and experience she received during those five years at the College and her journey to adulthood that largely shaped her into the person she is today. The College instilled in her a life-long passion for learning, a deep appreciation for diverse points of view, the ability to think critically and creatively, and the value of hard work. It also encouraged her to explore different options for her post-secondary



Denitsa with her husband Andy and children Mia (7) and Adrian (3)

## Denitsa Mavrova Heinrich

(Continued from page 6)



education in the United States

About half of the teachers and administrators at the American College of Sofia were from the United States. They encouraged students to consider applying to colleges outside Bulgaria and were instrumental in helping them navigate the college application process. She recalls “feeling so overwhelmed” paging through the Peterson’s Guide at the College library. The students “benefited tremendously from the collective wisdom of [their] U.S. teachers,” who helped them to narrow down options and choose the school that best matched their goals. For Denitsa, that was a small, liberal arts college, with a strong pre-law program and a diverse student population.

For her, that college ended up being Concordia College in Moorhead, MN. Denitsa and her family couldn’t even find Moorhead on the U.S. map her family had at home when she first learned that she had been admitted to Concordia.

And so, once again, at age 18, she packed her bags for another journey—she left her home country of Bulgaria to come to the United States. She arrived here with two suitcases and \$500—all her parents could afford to give her. As she puts it, “The rest I had to figure out on my own. My college experience was not always easy, but it was so worth it. Not only did I receive an education that prepared me to tackle anything, but I also learned the importance of grit.”

Denitsa worked in Dining Services full-time all four years of college to cover her living expenses. She recalls, “Really, I don’t think there is a job I didn’t do—from cook’s helper, to line worker, to dishwasher. I worked before, between, and after classes. I worked on weekends. I worked over breaks. The work ethic I developed while at Concordia is the same work ethic I brought with me to law school and to any positions I’ve held since then. It is the type of work ethic I hope to instill in my children as well.”

At Concordia, Dr. Max Richardson was her faculty advisor; he was also the pre-law advisor and would eventually become one of the most influential mentors in her life. She took every class he offered—Political Philosophy, Constitutional Law, Jurisprudence. He was the one who encouraged her—“again and again”—to pursue her childhood dream of becoming a lawyer and to apply to law school. She credits Max, in large part, for her ability to write with clarity and concision and for her love for teaching.

“Being in the classroom and working with students was Max’s biggest passion. It was contagious watching him challenge us to think critically, but also support us unconditionally as we struggled to find our voice,” she reminisces. “His student-centered approach and his ability to be both challenging and supportive was one of my early inspirations in devising my own teaching philosophy.”

After graduating from UND’s law school and clerking for both the North Dakota Supreme Court and the Eighth Circuit Court of Appeals, she started her academic career as a Faculty Fellow at UND. After a few months in the classroom, she knew that teaching “is what [she] was meant to do.” And so, in the second year of her fellowship, with the encouragement of her colleagues at UND, she decided to pursue a career in teaching as the next phase of her professional journey.

She began her full-time teaching career at Barry University School of Law in Orlando. Denitsa describes the LRW team at Barry (Susan Bendlin, Megan Bittakis, Helia Hull, Cathren Page, and Brian Sites) as “simply outstanding—committed to teaching, supportive of each other, and open to innovation.” Working in Barry’s collaborative LRW program gave her the chance to hone her teaching and explore her scholarship agenda. “I learned so much from the collective experiences of my colleagues and the diverse backgrounds of my students. I will always cherish the time I spent at Barry, the lessons I learned



Denitsa with the Barry 1L moot court champion and Prof. Terri Day, the Faculty Director of Barry’s Moot Court Program

## Denitsa Mavrova Heinrich

(Continued from page 7)

along the way, and the life-long friendships I formed.”

But not all journeys lead where the traveler might have anticipated, and the birth of her second child the summer after her first year at Barry led Denitsa and her husband, Andy (a North Dakotan whose family still lives there) to seize the opportunity to journey home. A position teaching Lawyering Skills at UND became available, and they decided to take it and move close to family to raise their two children.

Denitsa’s husband was raised on a family farm in Adrian, ND—population less than 100. Denitsa credits his “unwavering support and sacrifices” in helping turn her professional and personal goals into reality and says that his “can-do” attitude and positive outlook on life have “made our crazy journey over the last few years not only manageable, but actually fun. From the time I graduated law school to the time I came back as a full-time faculty at UND, we had six different houses in six years. We are experts at packing and moving—that’s for sure. And although I do say it often, I can’t say it enough—I am so grateful to have him by my side.”

Denitsa and Andy have two children—Mia (age 7) and Adrian (age 3). Mia is a second-grader who loves to read (the Harry Potter series is her current obsession), play the piano, and practice her gymnastics. This past summer, she and Andy spent a weekend squeezing lemons and baking cookies for a fundraiser project for a school program that provides meals to students in need. Her thoughtfulness inspired others in the community and, through matching donations, her lemonade stand raised close to \$600.

Adrian is “full of life, energy, and mischief.” A very busy child who has already broken his leg, Adrian has a “smile that melts our hearts. He loves anything that moves or makes noise, but nothing comes close to the love he has for his big sister.”

The final member of their family is their lovable dog, a boxer named Sir Optimus Prime. He is 10 ½ and “is finally starting to slow down.”

So Denitsa’s journeys have brought her to a place and time of joy in her life—joy in her home, her family, and her job. The skills courses that she teaches allow her to join her students on their educational journeys from the start and experience their growth throughout. Whether it’s Lawyering Skills or Trial Advocacy, she shares that she finds it “incredibly rewarding to watch the students’ transformation over the course of the semester or year.”

She continues, “I may begin each year with a new group of students, but what remains constant is the students’ transformation at the end of that year. There really is no greater joy than being able to accompany the students on their educational journeys from the start and to watch them transform into practice-ready professionals by the end. And every time I get a note from a student about the first brief they helped draft or the first jury trial they won, I know I am blessed to do what I do—teach.”

To get in touch with Denitsa, you can contact her at [denitsa.mavrovaheintr@law.und.edu](mailto:denitsa.mavrovaheintr@law.und.edu).



Denitsa’s kids with their lemonade stand



## UPCOMING LEGAL WRITING EVENTS

**March 15-16, 2019**

Rocky Mountain Legal Writing  
UNLV

**May 17, 2019**

Empire State Legal Writing  
New York Law School

**May 17, 2019**

Carolinas Legal Research &  
Writing Colloquium  
University of South Carolina

**May 29-31, 2019**

ALWD Biennial Conference  
Suffolk University Law School

**June 3-5, 2019**

Institute for Law Teaching &  
Learning  
Washburn University

**July 9-11, 2019**

Seventh Applied Legal  
Storytelling Conference  
University of Colorado

Check out these websites for more  
information on what's happening!

<http://www.lwionline.org/>  
<http://www.alwd.org/>  
<http://www.aals.org/aals-events/>

*To teach is  
to learn  
twice over.*

Joseph Joubert

**Selection and Presentation Process:** We believe it is important for LWI members to know our process for creating the newsletter. The Committee is organized into three teams, and each team is responsible for selecting, proposing, and writing the three profiles for a particular issue of the newsletter. To ensure a diverse newsletter, the teams propose the names of the selected individuals to the Co-Chairs to ensure that there is a breadth of coverage for each issue. Additionally, the Co-Chairs keep a master list of all the profiles, so that we can ensure a wide range of coverage over time.

The Faces of LWI Committee exists to allow us to learn about the interesting lives of our colleagues. For that to happen, we want and need a diverse selection of legal writing professors to profile. If you have someone in mind who we should put on the list for a future newsletter, please feel free to email any of the committee members listed below. If you could include a note explaining why you think the individual's profile would be particularly interesting, it will help us in developing priorities.

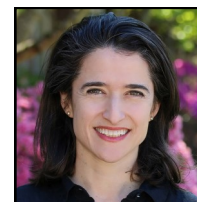
### Committee Members



**Grace Hum**  
Co-Chair, UC Hastings  
humgrace@uchastings.edu



**Rebecca Rich**  
Co-Chair, Duke  
rich@law.duke.edu



**Joan Rocklin**  
Co-Chair, Oregon  
jrocklin@uoregon.edu



**Cindy Archer**  
Loyola, LA  
cindy.archer@ls.edu



**Elizabeth Berenguer**  
Campbell  
berenguer@campbell.edu



**Alexa Chew**  
UNC  
achew@email.unc.edu



**Whitney Heard**  
Houston  
wwheard@central.uh.edu



**Jody Marcucci**  
DePaul  
jmarcucci@depaul.edu



**Tracy McGaugh Norton**  
Touro  
tnorton@tourolaw.edu



**Dyane O'Leary**  
Suffolk  
dloleary2@suffolk.edu



**Allison Ortlieb**  
DePaul  
aortlieb@depaul.edu



**Nancy Soonpaa**  
Texas Tech  
nancy.soonpaa@ttu.edu

