



## Christine Parizo: Author of *A Paralegal's Blog*

[By Robin Salisian]

Christine Parizo learned how to blend her passions for writing and law to gain professional success. The result? A blogging paralegal.

In 1999 Parizo graduated with her bachelor's degree in journalism. She landed a job as a copy editor for a well-known technology news service, stinted as an assistant news editor for a technology media company, and acquired pertinent skills regarding writing, accuracy, and interviewing.

However, her post-college dreams began to fade, and reality crept in. Journalism had lost some of its magic.

"My undergraduate experiences had taught me that newspaper journalism, my first choice, was a thankless job with lousy pay — I had a professor who was also an editor at the *Boston Globe*, and he would show up for classes in shirts with holes in them," says Parizo.

And while she was using her degree by writing for technology publications, her professional appetite hungered for more. It was then that Parizo began considering law school. She perused catalogues, researched universities, studied for the LSAT. Most importantly, she realized her writing, debate, and research skills were strong characteristics needed in becoming a lawyer.

"I...love the law because it really isn't black and white. Case law is always changing something, and staying on top of that is a challenge that I welcome," she says.

"However, the more I researched becoming a lawyer, the more I felt it would conflict with my other goals in life," continues Parizo.

Money also was an issue since she worked as a journalist, and affording law school suddenly appeared daunting. Finally, a friend mentioned paralegal work to her, and after some research Parizo liked what she had found.

### Q. What do you do for fun?

A. Spend time with my family, read voraciously, shoe-shop, do yoga and pilates, and study Italian language and culture.

### Q. What CD is in your CD player right now, or what music is on your iPod?

A. I'm definitely in the iPod category — I love my nano, and it's a very eclectic mixture: Bowling for Soup's *High School Never Ends*; Imani Coppola's *Legend of a Cowgirl*; some Dr. Dre and Notorious B.I.G.; a smattering of blink-182, The All-American Rejects, and Simple Plan; and a bit of Sara Evans, Toby Keith, and Tim McGraw's *My Next 30 Years*.

### Q. What is the last magazine you read?

A. *InStyle*. I love how they take a trend and make it appropriate for women of different ages, and I also get a lot of inspiration for my own wardrobe.

### Q. What is your favorite TV show?

A. *Lost* and TLC's *What Not to Wear*.

### Q. Who is your role model?

A. I don't really have one, but I admire any woman who can balance a career, a family, and still find time to look pulled-together.

"I would be able to research, write, draft pleadings, interact with clients — basically almost everything a lawyer does except represent clients in court, sign pleadings, and give legal advice — and I knew that not only would I be good at it, I would also have time to pursue my other life goals."

After the tragedy of September 11, Parizo looked hard at her career in technology journalism and knew something must change.

"That's when I started pursuing my paralegal career by researching paralegal programs," says Parizo. "I took a job as a legal secretary at a construction litigation firm, and I was gradually given assignments that were more paralegal work, such as drafting complaints and Shepardizing cases when the paralegals at the firm were too busy."

Next she enrolled in a paralegal certificate program at Middlesex Community College in Bedford, MA, graduating with her certification in 2004 as a member of its honor society, Phi Theta Kappa.

During her time there she thrived, enjoyed the coursework, and related well with the professors. She attended night classes while working full-time as a legal secretary ("which [she] felt would prepare [her] for being a paralegal"). Free time, therefore, was scarce. Nevertheless, Parizo became a member of the Massachusetts Paralegal Association, contributed articles to its newsletter, and attended its seminars.



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Then, in 2003, she received the NFPA/West Group First Place Scholarship, and a year later, she became a registered paralegal when she passed the Paralegal Advanced Competency Exam. After graduating, Parizo journeyed to Western Massachusetts to work as an estate administration paralegal. There, she joined the Western Massachusetts Paralegal Association.

"I gained a lot of practical experience dealing with deadlines, forms, and the courts at that job," says Parizo, "and through the WMPA I was able to network with other paralegals and learn about their specialties. The more I spoke with them, the more I wanted to be a litigation paralegal because I would get to use my research skills and critical thinking skills on a more regular basis."

Today, Parizo is living that dream. As a litigation paralegal, she works at Fierst, Pucci & Kane, LLP, in Northampton, MA, specializing in complex civil litigation and federal criminal defense work. Along with her paralegal work, however, Parizo continues to dabble in journalism. She began perusing the web for paralegal blogs but became disappointed in what she found. So she decided to start her own.

"I have to say that writing the posts is my favorite part of blogging, followed closely by knowing that I'm providing information that can be useful to fellow paralegals," admits Parizo. "Also, my sister-in-law told me that she wasn't entirely sure what paralegals do until she read my blog and that she was really impressed by it — and that my father, an aerospace engineer and part-time patent agent, was bragging about the blog to his friends — and I realized that I could also use my blog to raise the opinion of paralegals in

the eyes of not just paralegals but attorneys and the general public."

"I find topics by searching the Internet, email alerts, and things that happen in my own career," she continues. "For example, we started discussing e-discovery for one of my cases, and since I was delving into it, I thought I would share some of my findings with my readers."

But Parizo doesn't only enjoy blogging; she revels in all aspects of her career. From researching to working with one of the "100 Best Lawyers in Massachusetts" to being named one of Paralegal Gateway's 2008 "Paralegal Superstars" to website-design work to passing the PACE exam, Parizo finds rewards in everything she does. With such a positive mindset, it's no wonder she feels accomplished almost every day.

"I get to work on some very complex cases, and the intellectual stimulation is very rewarding," Parizo says.

"I also am the NFPA primary and technology coordinator for WMPA, and I really enjoyed my first convention as a delegate — it was great to be around so many people as enthusiastic about being a paralegal as I am," she adds.

Her enthusiasm is palpable, and she credits much of her success to the people in her life, specifically the WMPA president and a Middlesex professor.

"I've often felt like the WMPA president is an unofficial mentor. She's been a paralegal for over 20 years, and since moving to Western Massachusetts, she's been my go-to person for career questions and has given me a

lot of insight into being a paralegal in the Pioneer Valley," says Parizo.

And of the latter she says, "[M]y legal research and writing and real estate law professor was amazing as well — he really helped me understand how to research an issue, when to stop researching, and how to write up my findings. He also pushed me to do my best and wouldn't allow me to do anything halfway."

Having traveled from journalism to law, Parizo eagerly offers young professionals this advice:

"Network! Join the local paralegal association, get involved, join a committee, talk to other paralegals. Not only will you get moral support, you'll also hear about job openings, have the opportunity to learn new areas of law, and get to attend events. If you're part of an NFPA-affiliated association, you'll also receive the benefits of being an NFPA member as well."

"I would also strongly advise staying abreast of technology because it is constantly changing," she adds. "Technology can also save you time and make you more efficient, so the more you know, the better off you are. I personally love technology and am relatively fearless with it, and I definitely feel like that has helped me in my career."

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