



NEVADA TRAILBLAZERS

Meet Ogonna Brown: A Leader Committed to Doing All She Can

BY MARY BACON, ESQ. AND RYAN GORMLEY, ESQ.

“Do all the good you can, by all the means you can, in all the ways you can, in all the places you can, at all the times you can, to all the people you can, as long as ever you can.”

John Wesley may have said that first, but Ogonna Brown exemplifies it best.

It is usually a struggle to just balance work and life, but Brown makes a point to do all she can for all the people she can as long as she can. And the results have been life changing:

- “She is my forever mentor.”
• “She helped me get my first job.”
• “She believed I could be a lawyer and then helped me apply to law school. I wouldn’t have become a lawyer without her.”
• “She helped me secure a full ride to Boyd.”
• “She introduced me to pro bono by taking my first pro bono case with me. It’s a passion I’ve carried with me ever since.”

And the list only goes on from there.

Brown credits her upbringing, particularly her mother, for her giving spirit. Brown’s mother is Bulgarian and her father is Nigerian. After meeting in Bulgaria while her father was on an exchange student program, the pair fled Bulgaria to escape communism under the guise of a weekend trip. They landed in Germany with one piece of luggage each and nowhere to go. With a little help from a kind stranger she met in the hospital, Brown’s mother secured a job at Radio Free Europe, a U.S. government-funded radio station that broadcasts and reports news in countries where free press is banned by the government. Although the job was valuable for many reasons, its greatest value was that it allowed her mother to defect from a communist country to become an American citizen.

As an American citizen in Germany, Brown grew up on an American military base. Unlike many of her classmates who were in Germany with their parents on three-year tours, Brown lived on base until she was 17. As a self-described extrovert, she scheduled every hour of the day. In addition to keeping straight As, she started working as the lead bagger at the commissary when she was in sixth grade. She also joined every club and participated in every activity she could. She was in a rare stamp collecting club, a member of Model United Nations that allowed her to travel to The Hague, was the class president throughout high school, was on homecoming court, and was the “donut girl” at German American Oktoberfest.

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# Meet Ogonna Brown

Brown graduated as the salutatorian of her high school class and had an important decision to make upon graduation. She could stay in Germany with her mother and sister, or move to the U.S., where she had only been on vacation every two years. After securing a full ride scholarship to the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, she decided to move to Las Vegas, where her two sisters were already studying at UNLV. She worked as a researcher as UNLV’s Scientific Research Institute testing the accuracy of scanners reading German text, worked for a physicist and inventor, and also worked as waitress and a hostess through college at DiMartino’s and Portabellas. She graduated at the top of her class with a Bachelor of Arts and a minor in German. She then headed to the William S. Boyd School of Law as part of its first graduating class.

While in law school, Brown summer-clerked at two law firms, co-authored the Nevada Domestic Violence Resource Manual, and spent the year after law school clerking for Judge Johnnie Rawlinson in the Ninth Circuit. Almost two decades later, Judge Rawlinson remembers Brown as one of her most impressive clerks.

“Ogonna was a superstar in the making from the time she entered Boyd School of Law,” Rawlinson said. “She excelled in her studies there, and I had the good fortune of working with her as one of my law clerks. Her work ethic was exemplary as well as her work product. She has exceeded by far even my lofty expectations for her career in the law. She is a premier attorney and an even more impressive human being. Her generosity to others is legendary and her commitment to upholding the rule of law is unparalleled. We are all better for having Ogonna in our midst.”

After her clerkship, Brown became a pillar of the legal community, focusing on her dual passions of mentoring and pro bono work. One of her mentees, Andrea Gandara, is now an in-house counsel at City National Bank.

“Ogonna Brown’s influence as a mentor changed my life,” Gandara said. “She hired me in my first job as an associate in private practice, taught me the ropes in bankruptcy, and promoted me at the firm and in the legal community. I would not be where I am without her. She is so generous with her time. I always call her first when I need advice whether it’s about a difficult case or my career. She sets an amazing example as a tireless volunteer in our community, and I am very grateful to have in my life.”

Brown is an active volunteer and mentor at Boyd, is on the Legal Aid Center of Southern Nevada’s Pro Bono Advisory Council, serves on various committees for the American College of Bankruptcy, and was previously an officer with the Southern Nevada Association of Bankruptcy Attorneys. She also served on the Reinstatement Panel, Merit Selection Committee, and Magistrate Judge Merit Selection Panel for the Bankruptcy Court. She also volunteers her time to mentor law students on pro bono cases, and donates resources to Shade Tree, Goodwill of Southern Nevada, Big Brothers and Sisters of Southern Nevada, and the Girl Scouts.

Given her commitment to community, it is not surprising that she has been awarded the top honor of most organizations in the legal community. She was the “Attorney for the Year” for the Legal Aid Center of Southern Nevada, was awarded the Liberty Bell Award from the Clark County Law Foundation, and was awarded the Distinguished Service Alumni Award from Boyd, just to name a few.

Brown is a partner at Lewis Roca, focusing her practice on creditors’ rights, secured party representation, commercial litigation, and bankruptcy litigation. She is also a member of the Nevada Gaming Commission.

When Brown is not working or investing in our community, she loves to go to dinner with her husband or travel to the beach. She is also a princess by blood, is trilingual (Bulgarian, German, and English), and was on MTV Spring Break in college.



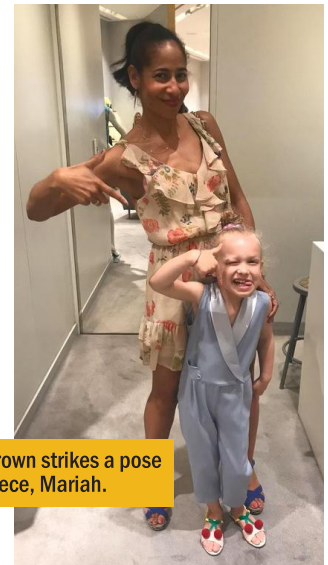
(From left:) Ogonna Brown hangs out with her friends Shea Backus, Shirley Blazich, Melissa Neiman, Tanya Lewis, and Sara Smegal in Sonoma, California.



In her free time, Ogonna Brown enjoys spending time with her husband, David.



Ogonna Brown spends time with her mom in Miami.



Ogonna Brown strikes a pose with her niece, Mariah.