

## PERSONAL STATEMENT

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UNIVERSITY OF NEW BRUNSWICK | FACULTY OF LAW

The last hummingbird darted away, and the crimson feeder oscillated against a soft cerulean sky. The days were getting shorter, and the Ruby-throat was beginning a journey south, well nurtured by what would always be his home. I was staying alone at the country house that my late grandmother had left to my family. She had marvelled at those birds, which hatch in Northern climates, migrate for the first time alone, and return to their birthplace each summer after: “They don’t even know where they’re going,” she would exclaim, “but they know how to get there, and they remember where they’re from.”

Every student who applies to law school is asked why. Many respond that it has always been their dream. Some say a legal education will let them save the world. And others are interested in the prospect of career. I respect these answers, for each at a time has been mine. But upon reflection, I submit that a destination need not be clear before a journey has begun; more important is to have the right direction and the confidence to know that the rest will be discovered. I will endeavour, therefore, to articulate why I aspire to study law, why I have chosen the University of New Brunswick, and why its faculty should choose me.

My grandmother was born to a poor Greek family and grew up in an immigrant ghetto washing dishes at her father’s diner. Determination led her to obtain a bachelor’s degree from the University of Saskatchewan and a medical degree from McGill. When asked to leave a medical symposium intended only for men, she asked the speaker why a life in her hands was worth less than in his. She specialized in neurophysiology, and with her husband—a genetics professor at her alma mater—became internationally renowned for discoveries on the inheritance of epilepsy. She received numerous awards and acted as a consultant for the National Institutes of Health.

For many years, my own boldness and resolve grew out of admiration for her. Yet, five years ago, perhaps the most meaningful lesson I learned from her life was through her death. As a child, she and I would invent games. I dreamed of being a pilot, soaring through the clouds, setting out on new adventures. She made the noises for my plane and at every take-off would salute—it meant “good luck and Godspeed.” For years hence, after each family visit to her country home, as we pulled out of the driveway, she would catch my gaze through the passenger window and give me that salute. Our last visit was to her room in intensive care at Brome-Missisquoi-Perkins Hospital. She could no longer speak, but we said our brief goodbyes. And as I slid the glass door closed, she raised up her hand: “Good luck and Godspeed.”

It was not a moment that would change my life, but one that came to represent that my journey had begun, as it were, flying alone. I began thereafter to reflect upon my goals, and I began to wonder, if I could lead so full a life, what stories, as a grandparent, I would be able to tell. I was, however, well prepared; I had learned not to be afraid of speaking truth to power, I had learned that excellence requires determination, and that no matter where the course of life ends up, not to forget what it means to be home.

I believe the history of the University of New Brunswick tells a similar story. In 1956, university administrator Alfred Bailey insisted that beavers be included on the forthcoming coat of arms in lieu of the maple leaves originally proposed: “You’ve got to have beavers for Beaverbrook.” He was referring to a publisher, politician, and philanthropist who had attended the University of New Brunswick and was later raised to the peerage of England in 1917 as Lord Beaverbrook—a distinctly Canadian title that he chose in reference to a community near his boyhood home. Before that coat of arms, university athletes took to wearing red and black to appear bold and distinctive at sporting events. And *Sapere Aude* means “dare to be wise.” Therefore, just as Lord Beaverbrook remembered his home, his home remembers him. Moreover, the university has dared to be noticed, and the students it nurtures have dared to be wise.

As of today, I have no such claim to boldness, historic narrative, or daring resilience in the face of adversity. What I can say is this: I am curious, and I strive for adventure; I seek creative solutions to old problems; I believe idealism is the heartbeat of innovation; I am logical, determined, and empathetic; I am a natural leader but work well as a team; and I take seriously the responsibility that the future is ours to shape.

I know these things because, over the past five years, experience has allowed me to learn who I am. When I was seventeen, I was hired at Saint Mary's Hospital as a telephone operator, and the responsibility of that job kept me awake for many nights. A year later, I was hired as a coordinator and trained to manage the hospital's Medical, Surgical, Psychiatric, Obstetric, and Intensive Care units. Since then, I have made policy recommendations to ensure patient safety, increase the accuracy of medical records, and improve customer service. I have been offered permanent positions in three of those departments and as Assistant to the Director of Infection Control. Working at that hospital has emboldened my self-confidence, intensified my organizational skills, and solidified my French bilingualism.

Meanwhile, I have volunteered at Tel-Aide, a Montreal-based counselling and listening centre. I have been privileged to lead conversations late into the night, learning the deepest secrets of perfect strangers. Through these hours of conversation, I have a newfound sense of empathy, and I have realized the commonality of our human condition—that fears, weakness, and worry exist in everyone, across every circumstance, income bracket, and social stratum. Finally, I have learned about depression, poverty, discrimination, and health problems directly from the people afflicted, which has led me to wonder how law and public policy can help to make lives better.

Ventures sprung from personal interest have also taught me well. In the past few years I have started four online retail businesses, of which four have failed—but I am proud to have learned a valuable lesson each time, and I am now working on a fifth. From these projects, I have broadened my creativity and learned that mistakes often afford the best lessons.

Lessons, however, need not mistakes to be made. With the encouragement of friends and family, I began work with a modeling agency, walked the runway at Montreal's largest wedding exhibition, and a year later had a small role in a sitcom produced by a major U.S. network. That work taught me never to lose poise or self-confidence; I remember the words of my coach: "No one has the right to change how you feel about yourself."

Indeed, sometimes confidence is what matters most. Upon receiving an email alert from Amnesty International, I wrote to Senegalese President Abdoulaye Wade, urging the extradition of former Chadian dictator Hissène Habré to Belgium to be prosecuted for crimes against humanity. Though that trial is still pending, I received a personal reply from Secretary General Abdoulaye Baldé with assurance that the matter would be referred to the African Union. I learned, at that moment, that no voice is too small to make a difference.

In six months' time, I will leave the home that has nurtured me, but I will not forget that it has made me who I am. As I push off to the recoil of crimson hearts, I can hope for nothing more than to land in the warmth of a new family—one to provoke intellectual challenge and inspire personal growth. In the end, I believe that legal studies will not only enable future prospects, but also represent an end in their own right. Therefore, I am eager to begin new involvement, earn new understanding, and develop new skills. And I hope that my experience and aptitudes might, in small part, enrich the classrooms that will thus enrich me.

I thank you for considering my application to the Faculty of Law and hope to continue this conversation in the weeks and months to come.

**Sincere Regards,**

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "W. J. H. M. A.", written in a cursive style.