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Mindful Lawyering Newsletter from the Mindfulness & Well-Being in Law  
Committee of the New York City Bar Association

Issue No. 5 | Fall 2023

## Welcome to the Mindfulness and Well-Being in Law Committee Newsletter!

**About Us:** We are a Committee of the New York City Bar Association and are here to serve the legal community in pursuit of balance. The Mindfulness & Well-Being in Law Committee provides programming, events, and resources to support members' wellness through the practice of mindfulness, including meditation, mindful movements, and other modalities that help bring one back to the present moment. Studies have found that mindfulness practices can assuage stress and anxiety, enhance emotional resilience, decrease implicit bias and reactivity, and increase creativity and productivity.

## In this issue...

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### Message from Chair,

Lisa Podemski

Thoughts of Fall

### Writing the Hard Stuff

by Ellen Frank

Discovering yourself  
through writing.

### Building Resilience

by Katuska Moure-  
Gutierrez

Building Resilience in the  
face of adversity.

### Mindful Moments

#### Getting Some ZZZ'ss

by Sarah Zweerink

### What Resists Persists

by Hope Wiener

Travels of a Yogic  
Lawyer without  
Borders

### I Hear a Symphony

by Wendy Silva

What does your internal  
symphony sound like?

### Upcoming Events

#### Sponsored by the MWBL

Join us for in-person and  
virtual events.

Practicing self-care  
by getting enough  
sleep.

For more information on our committee, click on link below:

[MWBL City Bar Homepage](#)

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Thanks to our contributing members Ellen Frank, Katuska Moure-Gutierrez, Maureen Riley, Wendy Silva, Annie Wang, Hope Weiner and Sarah Zweerink.

We are grateful for the support and contributions from our members and the legal community at large. If you have any ideas, art or written work that you would like to share with us, we would love to hear from you. Our sub-committee reviews all submissions and considers them for future issues. Do not hesitate to reach out by email to: [mindfulness.citybar@gmail.com](mailto:mindfulness.citybar@gmail.com)

## Message from Chair, Lisa Podemski, Esq.

Fall is my favorite season. I actually always looked forward to the new school year. I would get so excited to plan my first day of school outfit, to get a new pencil case, or Trapper Keeper. Still today, I love the new beginnings, the cooling weather, and the start of tights and boots season. If you know, you know. It's also the time of year when days start to get shorter. It starts to get noticeably darker earlier on starting in August. This is when, according to TCM or Traditional Chinese Medicine, a little bit of Yin starts to enter the Yang of Spring and Summer. In TCM nothing is either wholly Yin or wholly Yang. Nature is always playing some sort of balancing act.

For those of us sensitive to our environments, this is the time of year when our moods may shift darker too, especially for those who experience Seasonal Affective Disorder. Please take good care of yourselves and notice how you are reacting to this change in exposure to natural light, the chilling of the weather, and the browning of the leaves. Allow yourself to rest more, be gentle and compassionate with yourself, and notice if you start not wanting to do things that usually bring you joy. Explore what foods, activities, books, people, movies, or other things bring you comfort and seek out those things.

It's a great time to join us for Yoga for Lawyers or Mindfulness Breaks and to start reading for our upcoming Book Club. Please remember, it's brave and strong to seek professional help when you need it.



## WHAT YOU RESIST PERSISTS

by Hope Weiner, Esq.

**M\*A\*S\*H** fans will quickly understand when I describe myself as the Corporal Klinger of law. I am no fan of formal clothing, and I was wearing my yoga clothes everyday well before March 2020. My disdain for being and dressing like a lawyer (and I guess ever dating again) is balanced out by the pure joy I find in wearing my daily yoga outfits and teaching yoga. A colleague once described me as a "dirty jobs person" and I stand by that label. I will happily clean dirty toilets and showers at a Costa Rican yoga retreat, wipe down two-floors of bile at a West Side Bikram studio, or wash five hundred dishes at a holistic retreat center in upstate New York rather than sit at a computer! It only takes fifteen seconds in a frenzied courtroom to send me running over the Brooklyn Bridge to the studio. The only reason I keep up the practice of law is because I need to pay my bills!

So, roll back to the last week of April 2023...I am at JFK airport standing in line to board Air Maroc because after two years of pandemic related delays, I am on my way to teach yoga at a five-star hotel in Fez, Morocco. I am soaring and the plane has not even left the tarmac. I am living the dream. All yoga, no law, my kind of perfect!!!! I am a glamorous, international yoga teacher leaving the drudgery of middle age thousands of miles and several borders behind me. I arrive and the hotel is literally a Moroccan palace. I will be teaching rooftop yoga classes every morning to sophisticated hotel guests from all over the world except...there are NO students. Afterall, being a tourist in Morocco is a full-time job, and a tight bus schedule filled with crabby tourists does not allow time for a Savasana (that supine resting pose!).

While I did not give up the hope of teaching yoga (after all, we had promoted it), certainly at some point, someone would come. Nevertheless, to occupy my time, I began to search for volunteer opportunities and I came across exactly what I aimed I was NOT looking for. The ad snickered at me in the way that all plans are laughed at by "higher" beings. The ad read...the High Atlas Foundation ("HAF") needs help with its...legal clinic. The HAF operates a successful legal clinic in Fez out of its university that was seeking funding to open up another clinic, and in search of support with writing a grant proposal. Within hours of emailing my resume to HAF, I was contacted by the program manager and we were scheduling my visit to the law school at the Université Sidi Mohamed Ben Abdellah in Fez.

A few days later, my little red taxi was pulling up at the law school for my meeting with the program manager and the doctoral students who staff the legal clinic. I was wearing the best version of a professional outfit I could construct out of exceedingly random yoga clothes which I then accessorized with grimy, yellow Dansko kitchen clogs. I soon realized how lucky I was that while I did not have anything close to the correct professional clothing, at least, despite my dreams of being an ethereal jet set yoga instructor, I had "packed" my professional experience. I began volunteering and ultimately, working with the clinic was the best thing that could have happened to me. It allowed me to see and understand the real Morocco. The truth is I have never been able

to be a tour-bus tourist. All of my international experiences have been opportunities to get into the weeds, and this was indeed the opportunity I was looking for but didn't know it.

Working with the students and the legal clinic reignited a commitment to international women's rights and the urgency surrounding the legal status of women that had unconsciously waned in a city where women now outnumber men in the places I frequented. If a traveler in Morocco is lucky enough to not be restricted on a speeding tour bus, the first thing that one might notice is that there are very few women in the hundreds of restaurants and Parisian style cafes that fill the cities. The women in Morocco remain somewhat hidden. While women have greater freedom in Morocco than other countries in the MENA (Middle East and North Africa) region, the traditions of thousands of years continue and an outsider will have to work a little harder to learn about them. Although there have been a lot of productive changes to Morocco's legal system that have made the country's resources more accessible to those people requiring assistance, a large influx of migrants, and cultural norms related to the status of women still make bringing a legal action or following up with administrative matters intimidating to large segments of the population.

The students in Morocco do not receive the same financial support that students in the U.S. do and many of the doctoral students have to pay to attend conferences or the costs associated with conducting their research. My work with the HAF allowed me to meet and support the next generation of future female lawyers and journalists. I have no doubt that they are poised to truly change their country and the world. The women I met were proficient in multiple languages, possessed a keen understanding of the law, and radiated with the energy and ideas to move women's rights forward in spite of the substantial number of challenges that they will face participating in the workforce and in the governments of many of the countries throughout the MENA region. Yet, as I have heard at many graduation speeches, each generation is akin to new skin cells regenerating every seven years and every so often significant "game changers" rise up like the tides to make waves and give us a new way to move forward. I hope I was able to make a ripple. Although much of my travel experiences are a subject to address in greater length at another time, as a side note, I did end up teaching a yoga class to the students!

At some point, some of us may have had a yoga instructor utter that Jungian phrase "what you resist persists" and perhaps this by the skin of her teeth lawyer and her "Moroccan yoga adventure" proved that point emphatically while rolling out a little yoga mat in a law school thousands of miles and several borders away from New York City.





## WRITING THE "HARD STUFF"

by Ellen Frank, Esq.

Mindfulness is hard, especially when you have a million thoughts circling in your head that keep you from being fully present. I find that writing helps get everything out. If you want to find out what is really buried in your subconscious, try joining a writing workshop. In particular, if you have lost someone or something precious to you, write it out. If you are anxious, write it out.

A colleague of mine, knowing I always had a "book in my head" but was not writing it, recommended I get in touch with Diane Zinna\*, a published author, who runs writing workshops and coaching. Fortunately for me, Diane just started a morning magic circle, where a group of writers meet weekdays for one month to write together and create a space for their creative energies to meet. So, I begin to write...

It's been fourteen years since my mom died and seventeen years since my dad died. The grief never leaves; it just sits and stirs like a crockpot set forever. When I begin to write, my mother's girdles and wet stockings suddenly are hanging behind the bathroom door. The roses in my garden and the tomatoes I plant each year keep bringing back pieces of my parents to me. Writing helps me find a way to share myself with my grandchildren and sometimes, new friends. I am approaching the "senior years", the over 60 club and my knees and feet are talking back to me. Each Yom Kippur, the list of people I remember in the "memorial of the departed" keeps getting longer.

Memories of my mom's cluttered life and her obsession with gift shops and refrigerator magnets make their way into my writing. My dad was a Holocaust survivor and his nightmares and hoarding of cereal, toilet paper and soap resurfaces constantly. I remember sitting in a movie bathroom after being traumatized by the film, *The Fixer*. Why my dad insisted I come along to see movies which reminded him of home, I am only now beginning to understand. However, I am still haunted by the vision of a man holding his sore foot after he was tortured in one of the scenes.

Through writing, I am discovering I am not alone; I am filling up the world with a record of my life and my memories of my missed relatives and friends. I no longer feel that their footprints will be washed away by the sea, but they will be cemented into

the tracks I am making for the world that will follow me. Throughout history, letters have been written to say the unspoken and help the writer convey words sometimes too painful to speak aloud. I have discovered that I am a different person today after all the losses I have suffered, and I am accepting myself "as is."

\*For information about Diane and the important work she is doing to help people through her grief writing workshops, check out [DianeZinna.com](http://DianeZinna.com) for Grief Writing Sundays, biweekly at 2:00 pm.





## **BUILDING RESILIENCE**

by Katuska Moure-Gutierrez, LLM.

Life is hard and unpredictable. Indeed, life is in constant flux, however, we can learn to build a level of resilience which could minimize our suffering during those hard and unpredictable moments. Harnessing an inner strength allows one to rebound from setbacks or challenges experienced by the loss of a job, an illness, a disaster or the death of a loved one. Lowered resilience can contribute to dwelling on problems, continuing to feel victimized, experiencing ongoing overwhelm or turning to unhealthy coping mechanisms, such as substance abuse, eating disorders or risky behaviors. A number of factors contribute to how well a person adapts to adversities including how an individual views and engages with the world, the availability and quality of social resources, and specific coping strategies.

Resilience is the embodiment of tools used to bounce back from adverse events and mindfulness can play a pivotal role in building resilience to counter our anxiety, anger and other emotions that can cause problematic behaviors. While some people may become broken by one particular crisis or persistent stressors, remarkably many others are able to grow stronger and more resourceful as a result of cultivating a practice of resilience.

Resilience isn't about putting up with something difficult, being stoic or figuring it out on your own. In fact, resilience includes reaching out to others for support. While it's not a panacea for making your problems go away, it can give you the ability to see past the problems. The mindfulness tools highlighted below with familiar quotes from well-known people who have overcome insurmountable obstacles are helpful reminders on how to build resilience in the face of adversity.

**Being present.**

"Yesterday is gone. Tomorrow has not yet come. We have only today. Let us begin."-Mother Theresa

**Being flexible.**

"Blessed are the flexible, for they will not be bent out of shape."  
-Anonymous

**Know yourself.**

"Knowing yourself is the beginning of all wisdom." – Aristotle

**Remain hopeful.**

"Hope is being able to see there is light despite all of the darkness."  
-Desmond Tutu

**Get connected.**

"I define connection as the energy that exists between people when they feel seen, heard, and valued; when they can give and receive without judgment; and when they derive sustenance and strength from the relationship." – Brené Brown

**Make every day meaningful.**

"How wonderful it is that nobody need wait a single moment before starting to improve the world." -Anne Frank

For links to articles on cultivating resilience, go to:

[Psychology Today](#): 4 Ways Mindfulness Traits and Practices Build Resilience

[Mayo Clinic](#): Resilience Training







## I HEAR A SYMPHONY

by Wendy Silva, Esq.

I was listening to the score of one of my all-time favorite films recently, "Cinema Paradiso", a movie about movies. As I listened to the music, I revisited every scene as vividly as the next from the opening credits to the closing fine print (who else does that but a lawyer!). I remembered the exact theatre I was in and where I sat, how the popcorn tasted especially during the sorrowful scenes, who I was with and what we talked about after leaving the theatre. My emotions during the film ran the gamut between amusement and delight to melancholy and sorrow and then to hope and joy.

Thinking about this now makes me wonder what our emotions would sound like if we broadcast them in our daily encounters. What would our internal symphony sound like put to our daily behaviors and reactions? Would soft piano music be playing or marching band cymbals so abrupt and loud that you would want the film to speed up and hope for a Hollywood ending. Of course, our lives cannot be contained in the scope of time of any film we watch to escape reality. And knowing that a range of musical scores to evoke emotions is what makes for the best films, I also think about how our internal symphony moves us to make the best choices from one moment in life to the next.

It would be quite interesting to write and consider re-writing our "own life film" score. I am not that talented, nor do I read music, but I can surely hear it in my head, and you might too. In doing so, would we want to cut out a score and scene from our past? If so, how might that change who we are? Could it mean that you would not be reading this article, or be sitting at the chair you are in now, or have special moments with your loved ones? I venture to say that most people would not change even the most dreadful of scores in their "own life film" as those moments are perhaps the ones they have learned from the most and made them who they are today. However, could we still choose the music we want to broadcast or even hear in our own heads? Might putting a song right before our next reaction stop us in our tracks and make us more insightful and appropriate to the occasion or change the mood we want to see and feel ourselves living?

When dealing with difficult situations, you might ask yourself what musical score will accompany your response? Will you recognize it if doesn't match the scene you walked into? If you have to have a difficult conversation or make a tough decision, what music comes to mind? Will the music come across as compassionate and gentle, forceful, or cut-throat and is that the movie that you should make right now? Going forward, might you be able to fine tune your internal symphony in order to cope with the crashing cymbals when they arise. I hope so and I'll stay tuned...





## MINDFUL MOMENTS

### GETTING SOME ZZZs

by Sarah Zweerink, Esq.

Recently, I had a meeting with some colleagues via zoom. At one point, one person mentioned how much trouble he was having falling asleep, which had never happened before. The colleague mentioned that, as a result, he had started taking sleeping pills. The second person mentioned he was taking melatonin for sleep and that it was helping him. The conversation got me thinking about my own sleep patterns which admittedly have been up and down, so I mentioned that I had started listening to a meditation app, before sleep and that usually, I don't even make it until the end of the 10-15 minute program. There are several apps that do essentially the same thing).

Sleep (or lack thereof) is big news and a huge issue. I recently read an article on Weight Watcher's website highlighting 9 tips for a better night's sleep, which I've summarized below:

- Set up a sleep schedule that you follow all week. It is okay to take an extra-long nap on the weekends, but you need consistency overall.
- Enjoy some morning sun. Studies show that sunlight helps the brain into alertness mode, which starts the brain's clock ticking toward sleep mode later at night.
- Move around during the day. Shoot for 2-5 hours of exercise per week. That is as little as 20 minutes per day – pick something you enjoy, a brisk walk, dancing to 80's music – whatever works for you!
- Find a good a mattress. Time to visit "BridgetT" at the Jordan's Sleep Lab.
- Watch your caffeine intake. Studies show you shouldn't have caffeine 4-6 hours before bedtime or it could impact your sleep.
- Wind down with a mindfulness app.
- Skip the nightcap. If you are going to drink, try to drink at least 4 hours before bedtime.
- Create a peaceful sleep environment.
- Set a digital curfew. Turn off all digital devices, which also emit blue light, 30-60 minutes before bed.

I practice family law and I remind my clients that during a divorce, one of the most important things they must do is to take care of themselves, physically and emotionally. Sleep is a huge pillar of the self-care routine. When you can get enough sleep, you are able to manage stress better, think more clearly and create less wear and tear on your body. Getting enough sleep can be a huge challenge during a divorce or other stressful time, so be sure to put a priority on getting your ZZZ's.

\*Sarah Zweerink practices law in Boston, Massachusetts and shares with us the "Mindfulness Matters" corner of her law firm's family law newsletter.



We look forward to seeing you at our upcoming virtual events.  
Please click on blue links to register!

[Mindfulness Break](#)

Friday, October 13, 2023 | 1:15 p.m. - 1:35 p.m.

[Yoga for Lawyers Virtual Session](#)

Thursday, October 26, 2023 | 7:00 p.m. - 7:45 p.m.

[Yoga for Lawyers Video Series](#)

[Mindfulness and Well-Being in Law Book Club](#)

Thursday, November 16, 2023 | 7:00 p.m. - 8:30 p.m.

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Selected Reading

[The Good Life: Lessons from the World's Longest Scientific Study of Happiness](#)

by Robert Waldinger, MD and Marc Schulz, PhD.

For more information on our committee visit:

[MWBL City Bar Homepage](#)