



## *Joel Gaub Connor, JD 2005* *Conservatorship and* *Mental Health Practice*

Joel had worked for nearly twenty years in the pharmaceutical industry before deciding to go to law school. “I was always interested in the law, and as a pharmacist, I spent a lot of time working with the DEA, FDA, and various regulatory agencies.” But, it was only when he came out to California and heard ads for online law schools that he thought he could work a legal education into his schedule. “I worked for Amgen and traveled seventy percent of my time as a clinical trial auditor where I had to make sure FDA laws and drug protocols were being followed. In fact, shortly after I started at Concord I was sent by Amgen to Australia where I went to five cities in two-and-a-half weeks. I was able to ship all my books there and still attend classes, thanks to the Internet.”

Initially, Joel’s idea was to stay in the pharmaceutical industry and work in the legal department of the industry. However, he soon came to realize that he wanted a change. He wanted to be able to use his medical and legal knowledge to help others. Conservatorships was an area that interested him—and something he had learned about through his internship with the LA County Bar Association’s Domestic Violence Program. “This area of the law is much different from most. It’s not antagonistic. With conservatorships and trusts, everyone works for the best interest of the conservatee.”

Ultimately, he bought a conservatorship practice from a retiring attorney and has been working in mental health courts ever since. “Most of my clients have mental illnesses, Alzheimer’s, or post traumatic stress,” he explains. “I look out for their interests by working with a financial planner to manage their assets, and I distribute allowances, and pay for their room and board.”

Studying the law not only changed his career, it also changed his life and his relationship with friends. “At this stage of my life, I have a lot of friends who are beginning to deal with end-of-life issues and estate planning. As an attorney, I’m able to help them.” Reaching out to some of the most vulnerable of the society through his work with conservatorships, Joel has become interested in working as a trustee for special needs trusts. “A lot of people don’t want to practice this type of law because it’s a hassle. You’re working with developmentally disabled kids who have been abused by the school system, and you have to keep a lot of records and maintain accountability for their money, annuity investments, etc.,” he explains.

“I like the ability to help people, particularly those with mental illnesses, and everyday I feel I’m accomplishing something toward that end. When you get to a certain stage in life you realize it’s not just about the money. This is something I get a lot of reward from doing.” Joel was recognized precisely for his passion for helping others when he won the L.A. County Bar Association’s Hon. Benjamin Aranda III Outstanding Public Service Award in (2006) for time he volunteered working with their Barristers Domestic Violence Project.

The most valuable thing he gained from his Concord experience was an understanding of—and an ability to see—the nuances in the law. “I came to see that the end result was not as important as how one got there, that is, the process and rationale for a particular end result was more important. This is diametrically opposed to the medical world where the end result—such as the curing of a disease—is most important. In the medical arena, you often make the best guess of initial therapy, but have to do more lengthy evaluations to confirm your diagnosis. In law, you plot out the course of action you will take and explain the rationale before embarking on a course of action,” he explains.

In Joel’s spare time he and his partner, an actor, enjoy and support live theater, travel to Europe and the East Coast and care for their four dogs and four cats.