

Former actress now drawn to appeal of the legal stage



By Brian Cox

When Melinda Bialzik was feeling the mounting pressure of doing well on her first end-of-semester exams at Harvard Law, she had an epiphany: She shouldn't think her entire future was riding on how well she did.

"I decided I would just do the best I could and enjoy the ride," says the Milwaukee attorney. "I realized that if I didn't succeed in this very narrow way, there were a million different ways that I could have a successful life and career. There isn't a singular path. Just because this is what was in my mind and looks good on paper, doesn't mean this is the only path for me. That's a hard thing to listen to and accept sometime."

Her new perspective worked. The pressure lifted and she went on to earn her law degree from one of the best law schools in the country.

The irony is that when she was younger, she always swore she wouldn't be a lawyer. She saw how hard her father worked as an attorney in business litigation and understood well how stressful the work could be. Instead, she felt drawn to the stage and had early aims of being an actress.

But in her junior year at Lawrence University, where among other roles she played Nora in Henrik Ibsen's "A Doll House," she had second thoughts about the lifestyle that often comes with being an actor after watching some of her friends live it. She wasn't interested in moving to New York and she didn't find the vagabond



A native of Wisconsin, attorney Melinda Bialzik has enjoyed downhill skiing since she was young.

nature of touring companies attractive. She made the decision to view performing as a hobby rather than a vocation.

"An acting career is not just the moment on stage, it's the life that comes with it," she says. "It was not that hard of a decision."

It was then she turned her attention to law. When she mentioned to her mother what she was thinking, her mother didn't want to get her father's hopes up and said, "Let's not tell your dad until you're sure."

When she had made up her mind for certain and did well on the LSAT, it was her father who suggested she apply to Harvard.

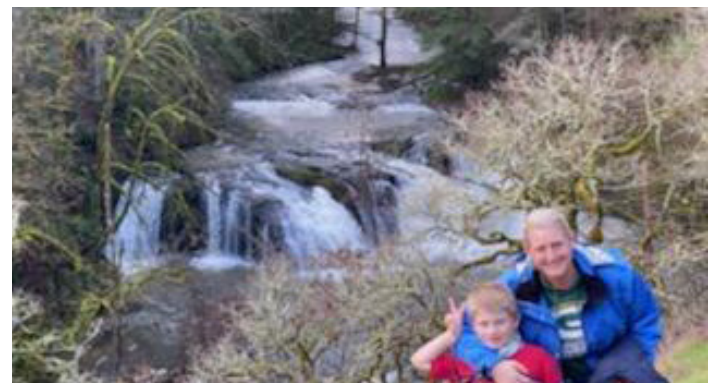
Born and raised in a suburb of Milwaukee, Bialzik spent her youth riding horses and downhill skiing. She was on the swim team in high school and was, in fact, the sole member of the school's dive team for two years. She played the cello in orchestra and the tuba and sousaphone in marching band.

At Lawrence University in Appleton, Wis., Bialzik studied voice and majored in anthropology, which she says her legal colleagues now sometimes find humorous.

"But I think it's a perfect major for law because anthropology teaches you to try to see things from different perspectives and to understand why people do what they do," she says.

At Harvard, she at first felt a little intimidated by her classmates and what they seemed to have already accomplished, but she adjusted quickly. Her first summer, she accepted an internship at Foley & Lardner back home in Milwaukee. Her second summer she interned at Jones Day in Cleveland.

After graduating, Bialzik returned to Milwaukee for what she



Melinda Bialzik and her son, Connor, hike near Portland, Oregon.