Plano native uses education to ease the sting of tragedy

BY MELANIE HESS

PLANO NATIVE AND COLLIN College alumna Nhi Le's job begins in the midst of tragedy. However, despite what she describes as heartbreaking situations, Le says this is exactly how she envisioned using her law license.

Representing workers and families who suffer from exposure to asbestos poisoning as a result of corporate defendants who knowingly concealed the dangers, Le, a plaintiff's attorney at The David Law Firm in The Woodlands, Texas, typically meets her clients when they are extremely ill with little time left or have recently lost a loved one.

Former Collin student Nhi Le.

"The most rewarding aspect of my job is when we are able to help a client's memory live on in a way that also helps provide for their family's future," Le said. "I get to help individuals and families during their most trying and vulnerable times."

Her Journey

Raised by two Vietnamese immigrants, who moved to the U.S. with a dream of starting new, Le and her sister understand the value of freedom.

"Every opportunity and privilege my sister and I have had is owed to their sacrifices," Le emphasized.

Also treasuring her educational opportunities, Le began investing in her future early. In addition to her parents, she cites two local individuals as the most influential in shaping her career.

"My academic mentor, Collin College Professor Dr. Kyle Wilkison, taught me the importance of civic participation, and my work mentor, Steve Chapman, taught me the power of the law," Le said.

As a senior at Plano East Senior High, Le began interning with Chapman, a Plano attorney, and retained the position until moving to Houston for law school.

"Steve taught me that the law is a very powerful tool for the most vulnerable in our society," Le said.

Wilkison was the professor for one of Le's required core courses at Collin College.

"His American history classes brought the topic alive and forced students to use their critical thinking skills. His method of teaching is perfect preparation, not just for law school, but for life," Le said. "Dr. Wilkison drove home the importance of civic participation and emphasized the role we could play as future leaders in society. For the first time, I could see the path from the classroom to something bigger."

Le enjoyed her first course with Dr. Wilkison so much that she continued to enroll in his other courses for the duration of her time at Collin College. Through this, the two developed an academic mentorship that still continues a decade later.

"Dr. Wilkison and I have remained in close contact. To this day, we share meaningful face-to-face conversations. He continues to offer me effective mentoring and advice on my career and life in general."

Dr. Wilkison said he is grateful to have had Le's first-rate mind and character in his classroom.

"Ms. Le possesses an astonishing capacity for hard work. I am immensely proud of her and look forward to keeping track of her contributions to society," Wilkison said. "Her achievements also illustrate the critical role Collin College plays in opening doors of opportunity for students."

After transferring from Collin College and completing her bachelor's degree in economics at Baylor University, Le continued on to earn her law degree at South Texas College of Law.

Now living out the dream that found its roots in North Texas, Le cherishes the role that allows her to help get justice for "the poor, the weak and the injured."

"As an attorney, I am privileged to be able to play a small part in encouraging corporate responsibility and respect for human life," Le said.

Looking ahead, Le hopes to serve as a mentor to others, paying forward the same generosity and mentorship she was afforded.

For more information about transfer opportunities and pre-professional programs at Collin College, visit www.collin.edu/academics.

MELANIE HESS is a public relations associate with Collin College.