



Alison Monahan: Welcome back to the Law School Toolbox podcast. Today, we're talking with Visla Rudiger, a transgender attorney about her experiences in the legal profession, at work, in court, and more. Your Law School Toolbox host today is Alison Monahan and typically I'm here with Lee Burgess.

Alison Monahan: We're here to demystify the law school and early legal career experience so that you'll be the best law student and lawyer that you can be. Together we're the co-creators of the [Law School Toolbox](#), the [Bar Exam Toolbox](#), and the career-related website [CareerDicta](#). I also run the [Girls Guide to Law School](#).

Alison Monahan: If you enjoy the show, please leave a review or rating on your favorite listening app. If you have any questions, don't hesitate to reach out to us. You can always reach us via the [contact form](#) on [lawschooltoolbox.com](#), and we'd love to hear from you. With that, let's get started.

Alison Monahan: Welcome back. Today, we're talking with Visla Rudiger, a transgender attorney about her experiences in the legal profession, at work, in court, and more. So, welcome. Can you give our listeners a bit of your back story for some context?

Visla Rudiger: Sure. I am 32 years old. I have been practicing law for 8 years. I live in ...

Alison Monahan: Wow! So you started early.

Visla Rudiger: Yeah. I started law school when I was 21. I went to William and Mary. I've lived in Virginia my entire life. I currently practice in southeastern Virginia. Let's see, I spent my first three years at a mid-sized regional law firm doing complex civil litigation, medical malpractice defense, and intellectual property claims. Now, I've spent the past 5 years as in-house counsel. I'm still a litigator technically. But, I'm in a hearing maybe once a month as compared to way more frequently when I was at the firm. But, I'm the only lawyer at the company that's not afraid of court. So, that makes me a litigator.

Alison Monahan: Right. It's a good skill set to have. I clerked for a district court judge and I was a litigator too. So, there is definitely something about being comfortable in that environment.

Visla Rudiger: Mm-hmm. Though it's funny how quickly you feel like not a litigator when you're not in court every day.

Alison Monahan: Oh! For sure!

Visla Rudiger: But, anyway, so yeah, that's what I do now and that's what I've done for a while. And, apropos of the topic of your show I am a trans femme, non-binary attorney.



- Alison Monahan: Right. That's what you said when we were corresponding. For somebody who might be kind of unfamiliar with this topic or unfamiliar with some of that terminology could you kind of break that down? Walk me through what that means.
- Visla Rudiger: Sure! I'm going to start at the end. So, non-binary means that I do not identify fully as a man or a woman. I explain it to people that gender is a spectrum like most things. Very very few things in the world are black and white. And so, gender if you want to imagine it as a scale from like one to 10. If one was completely male and 10 was completely female. I fall somewhere like an 8.
- Alison Monahan: Okay.
- Visla Rudiger: The funny thing is when I was first giving that explanation I think I said like a six.
- Alison Monahan: Right. I was like eight seems pretty high to me.
- Visla Rudiger: So, it's also something that's changeable.
- Alison Monahan: I'm thinking I'm probably like an eight. I don't know.
- Visla Rudiger: Yeah. It's funny. I've always thought gender was definitely like a spectrum. But, even back when I identified as male, I was like well you know more I'm probably more like a three. That number has gone steadily up over the course ...
- Alison Monahan: Interesting. I'm thinking for me, well you know I'm not that girly-girl. Like okay I'm not a 10 then, I'm not a nine, maybe I'm an 8. Sometimes I'm kind of androgynous. My dress.
- Visla Rudiger: Exactly so.
- Alison Monahan: I think it is interesting. People have all kinds of viewpoints on this, but I think when you think about it, of course, we all kind of define where we are on that spectrum on any given day.
- Visla Rudiger: Yeah absolutely. And so that's on binary. I identify as trans because I am transgender. I do not identify with the gender I was assigned at birth so when I was born my parents thought I was a boy. So they named me as a boy and they raised me as a boy. And so being transgender means not identifying with that kind of initial assessment that you were given as a child.
- Alison Monahan: Don't imagine that can be surprising to people later.
- Visla Rudiger: Yes. I have gotten the full gambit of responses. From you know, absolute loving acceptance and excitement to complete rejection. I describe myself as trans



femme rather than trans female. Because as I said, I'm non binary. I'm towards the feminine end of the spectrum and so that's what I say.

Visla Rudiger: The other thing that I always include in my bio is that I'm also a parent.

Alison Monahan: Oh wow

Visla Rudiger: I have a three and a half year old. A son. Well son for now, he can be whatever he wants.

Alison Monahan: You think that. That's the choice you've made.

Visla Rudiger: That's me and what those terms mean. The one thing I would say is that terminology changes really rapidly and a lot of people have a lot of different feelings about certain terms. I think the ones that I've used and described here are pretty neutral. There are things that aren't particularly controversial, at least among open minded people.

Visla Rudiger: But it's always important to just respect the terminology that people use for themselves. Because not every person is going to define non binaryness in the same way. Or some people would say that I'm gender fluid, cause I've changed how I feel about things, but I don't really identify with that term. There's all kinds of terms and I think the best thing you can do is kind of work with whoever you're dealing with to accept however they've chosen to express their gender. It's so complicated. It's complicated for us, it's complicated for our friends. It's always just good to be open minded and let people define themselves however they want.

Alison Monahan: Well that's talk about that a little bit. There are a lot of people out there I think depending on where they live or what kind of exposure they've had to new and different things. Maybe thinking okay this all sounds interesting kind of foreign to me but I'm open about it. Do you have any resources or places they can look, okay, these are the basics? I understand the basics of these terminologies, I don't want to say something offensive that kind of thing?

Visla Rudiger: I think a lot of LGBT advocacy groups have pretty good resources for ... one of the best things that I've seen are some of the media resources that people list. If a reporter is trying to talk about something and they're not familiar it gives them just a step by step here's what some of those words is.

Alison Monahan: I looked up ... I found some of those. I think [GLAAD had a good one](#).

Visla Rudiger: Yeah I was just looking at GLAAD myself before we got on the podcast. They have a pretty good one. Like I said, no one person's opinion is going to cover everything and be perfect. But when I read through theirs, I was "Yeah, this is all



very straight forward. It's understandable and it's respectful". I would recommend that to any listener who is open minded but confused.

Alison Monahan: Or just generally ... not even confused, just kind of uninformed I think people are. I mean I grew up in rural North Carolina.

Visla Rudiger: North Carolina has had some bad times.

Alison Monahan: Yeah But then I moved to San Francisco. I've had kind of exposure to both aspects of this. I think about people that maybe I grew up with who would just be like "Whoa, this is just weird". You know?

Visla Rudiger: It's very interesting. Southeastern Virginia is fairly metropolitan. It's one of the larger population areas in the state other than Northern Virginia, right outside of D.C. And you have a lot of people from a lot of different areas who live here either temporarily or permanently. But you also have a big military presence. If you drive for an hour in any direction, you're in the middle of nowhere all of a sudden. And so you meet a wide variety of people with a wide variety of experiences.

Alison Monahan: I'd imagine. I grew up in a town of literally 6000 people in North Carolina.

Visla Rudiger: Oh my goodness.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. It was a lot. But even there I think about people I know. They might be, not necessarily closed minded, I mean a lot of them are, but a lot of them aren't. But I think they just need a place to start.

Visla Rudiger: Yeah I've been the first trans person that I think a lot of people have met. And that can be a really daunting experience for both sides.

Alison Monahan: Right. Well kind of talk to me about that. What are some of the key challenges or obstacles that you faced and was it the same thing that you thought you'd face or are you encountering new and unexpected challenges along the way?

Visla Rudiger: Everyone's experiences are going to be unique. But mine ... one of my friend's described it to me as, he said "obviously you went from zero to trans in like a week".

Alison Monahan: Okay good. Cause I was going to ask about that.

Visla Rudiger: And I really did. It's not something I took flippantly or something like that. But it felt in a non dramatic way for a lot of my life. I know a lot of people have genuinely suffered their entire life and have felt there is something deeply wrong and have felt powerful dysphoria about their bodies and identities. I



hadn't had that experience. I always felt a little weird I felt things were off. I would always say "Ah, I'm just a really effeminate guy". I would make excuses for my tendencies towards, in dress and in preferences and things.

Visla Rudiger: And I would always feel like "Yeah I'm a guy but..."

Alison Monahan: Just like not a guy guy.

Visla Rudiger: Yeah It's just like I'm just not a macho guy. And that was fine for awhile. And then over time it just built up and built up and I met a bunch of people who were LGBT and some of them were trans feminine and I talked to them. And I became very good friends with them over the course of a couple years. And then over the course of a couple weeks honestly I was just like "Is this happening? Like I think this is a thing that's real."

Visla Rudiger: The first thing I did was I ... I first contextualized it as coming out non binary. I was like "That's really what's going on". Because I'm not binary and I just need to come out with that and that'll be fine. So I talked to some of my close friends about it, I talked to my wife about it, at the time. I've since become separated. And everyone was like "Oh yeah that's great, we really support you. And we think this is great for you". And I was like "Yeah all it means ... It doesn't really change anything, it's not really a big deal". And so within a week of that I went into my office and I was like "Hey, this is how I feel". And it was during Pride of last year. And I went in and I was like "Hey so this is what this means, I'm non binary". And I remember one of the specific things I told people was, "This doesn't necessarily change anything, some days I might wear a dress, some days I might not". I have not worn pants since that day.

Visla Rudiger: I've worn pajama pants, but I've worn either a skirt or a dress every day. Once the floodgates open it was just like "Okay I'm trans now. I'm going to transition I'm going to start taking hormones, I'm going to change my name". I went by neutral pronouns for about a month, I went by they/them. But it was very rapid that I was like "No this is not for me, I want to be she/her". That's what I've gone by ever since.

Visla Rudiger: I picked the name Visla actually right out the gate because it was a kind of an ambiguous name, people don't know what to do with it. That's totally fine, but then I just stuck with that. I really enjoy it.

Alison Monahan: This must have been pretty shocking to people I imagine.

Visla Rudiger: Yeah. Shock was the first impression that I got from most people.

Alison Monahan: Was that what you expected to get?



- Visla Rudiger: I did. It was actually ... I'd say the most surprising thing was how positive most people were. I didn't get any immediately negative reactions. I got very guarded confusing reactions. I think the one thing I wish I had done a little differently when I was coming out is given people more time to react before being like "tell me what you think", or "You're giving a forever answer on this".
- Alison Monahan: And did you tell people generally ... was this a conversation, or in person?
- Visla Rudiger: Anyone I could do it with in person I did it in person. The first person I talked to other than people I was like consulting with to decide how to go about it, was my then wife. And she was immediately supportive. One of the first things I said to her was "Look if this is going to mess things up for us, I don't even want to start going down this road". So that was number one. But at the same time, I didn't appreciate how difficult it would be for someone to give an immediate answer. Not that I would change anything I'm going to do. It's not like I'm asking their permission but at the same time I could have given people a little bit longer to process before being like "Okay, now react. Tell me what you think."
- Alison Monahan: Right so part of it is you've had at least some amount of time to think about this. It's not the very first time you're hearing about it.
- Visla Rudiger: Yeah it was interesting. I told her. I told my parents. I told my boss before I told my parents.
- Alison Monahan: Oh wow. Okay.
- Visla Rudiger: As it happens, my father works at the same company that I do. He was being told as part of the work people, but he was down the line. My actual direct supervisor, who I told first. And everyone at work was pretty positive. It was really funny. You could gauge how long and complicated the conversation was going to be by generation.
- Alison Monahan: And that's kind of my understanding. That younger people are just generally more familiar, more comfortable. I mean my sister for example works for a non-profit in Oakland, and they're kind of known as a friendly workplace. And she's like "Oh this nothing. Everyone on their email has what pronouns they are".
- Visla Rudiger: Right exactly. And I think for almost everyone at that office, I was the first transgender person they had ever met in person. This is the first encounter they had with the whole concept outside of things they'd seen on the news. Which do not exactly give the best perspective. Especially here. We're right on the border of North Carolina. It was peak bathroom bills at the time that I came out. It was not fun.



- Visla Rudiger: Anyway, that's kind of how it went initially. It was mostly good. I won't lie, I basically lost half my family. My mother's side of the family is not supportive.
- Alison Monahan: That's unfortunate.
- Visla Rudiger: My grandmother called one time ostensibly to wish me happy birthday except she refused to call me by my legal name. It was like "Hey dead name". And I was like "No-"
- Alison Monahan: That person doesn't exist actually.
- Visla Rudiger: I was like "No, wrong name". And she was like "No, it's this". I'm like "No it's not". And she's like "You're so hateful". And I'm like "Okay, that's your problem, bye-bye".
- Alison Monahan: Happy birthday to me.
- Visla Rudiger: That was actually in April of this year. I came out in June of last year. It's not failure of time to get used to it. She just doesn't want to. And there a lot of people like that and I do my best to just not let them get to me.
- Alison Monahan: And I think this goes along with any other family oriented issue, there's a limited amount you can really do. People are going to do what they do basically.
- Visla Rudiger: And to give some credit, where credit's due for the older generation. My grandfather on my dad's side, has been one of the most supportive people of anyone I've ever talked to.
- Alison Monahan: Interesting.
- Visla Rudiger: First thing he said when I told him about it was "I loved you when you were a little kid. I loved you when you were a boy, I loved you when you were a man. And I will love you as a woman". And he gave me a big hug. I still cry every time I think about that.
- Alison Monahan: I know. I'm tearing up.
- Visla Rudiger: So it's not all ... there are definitely going to be people who are like my grandmother but fortunately the folks like my granddad make a way bigger impact.
- Alison Monahan: What advice do you have for someone who maybe is considering this and thinks that maybe, or parts of their family, may not be supportive? What can they do? Are there people they can lean on? Any techniques?



Visla Rudiger: Be prepared. There's really nothing you can do to change their minds. Don't try to argue with them. You don't have to justify yourself to them. Is what I would say. You are telling them this. You're not asking them. You don't have to beg them. You don't have to get their approval. You're telling them because you care about them. And if they care about you, they'll listen and they'll get used to it. I have tried to be patient with some members of my family. And I've seen some progress with that.

Alison Monahan: It hasn't been that long. I have a story-

Visla Rudiger: It hasn't even been a whole year.

Alison Monahan: People I grew up with in North Carolina only came out as gay and their parents for two years wouldn't speak to them. But now they've come around and everyone gets along. It's possible I guess.

Visla Rudiger: I can see that happening to some degree. I think I will always have a little bit of difficulty with anyone who took that amount of time but I think give them the time they need and don't feel like you have to engage with them. If they need time then they can take that time to themselves and you don't owe them your suffering with them. You don't owe them sitting there being mis-gendered and being called the wrong name and all that stuff.

Visla Rudiger: You can just let them deal with their own issues. And when they're ready they can come around to you.

Alison Monahan: You really don't have to go to Thanksgiving. It's fine you can do something else.

Visla Rudiger: I had the best Thanksgiving I've had my entire life this past year. By not going anywhere.

Alison Monahan: It's really very liberating.

Visla Rudiger: Yeah it was nice.

Visla Rudiger: So yeah that's how it was with family. Work was a little bit different.

Alison Monahan: How so?

Visla Rudiger: I was kind of in the position of ... I'm their attorney. And I kind of had to advise them. I said straight up, "This is a weird situation but I'm coming out to you like this. Let me give you a [general idea of what the law is](#) on this".

Alison Monahan: Well talk to me a little bit about that. [What kind of protections, if any, do people have](#). Formally or in different areas.



- Visla Rudiger: Its something that there's a lot of disagreement on. The position of the federal government up until the current administration was that transgender people are protected and the EEOC had taken that position and some of the federal courts had taken that position. But now the attorney general has come out with an opinion that reverses that at least as far as the government is concerned. That doesn't change the decisions of the courts. That doesn't change the decision of the EEOC. But it does change whether government agencies are going to be helping.
- Visla Rudiger: That can kind of turn things around from a practical perspective. All of that is under gender discrimination. So it's a matter of interpreting this and saying. It's not that transgendered people are protected it's that I'm protected because I'm being treated differently because of my gender.
- Alison Monahan: Which totally makes sense to me, legally speaking.
- Visla Rudiger: It should be straight forward. It really should, but it's not. And you're getting different decisions from different places and depending on what state you live in you have a completely different experience.
- Alison Monahan: Cause a lot of these states and localities have different rules right?
- Visla Rudiger: Exactly. Virginia has been working in a positive direction, fortunately and started to implement this stuff in the state government, where the governor can simply just by order, outlaw discrimination based on certain things. And he's done that for state employees, obviously that's a very limited group. But it shows the way the state is trying to go.
- Visla Rudiger: And so what I would say is, there's protection there, but don't think you have a slam dunk. It's not as if it's racial discrimination or straight forward sex discrimination. You will probably not have the help of the federal government and you would be best off looking at your local laws and protections, if they exist, because they'll be a lot clearer and be a lot more current. That's where I'm at there.
- Alison Monahan: So you kind of advised your workplace "Oh there's probably not that much I can do if you decide to discriminate against me", and then what happens?
- Visla Rudiger: I did, I did. Honestly I was completely honest with them. I said "Look you can probably fire me and get away with it. I really hope you don't want to, and I'll fight you if you do. But please don't". And honestly that was a pretty good ice breaker with most of the executives that I talked to. They know that I'm not trying to start trouble. I'm not here to instigate a law suit. I just want to keep my job and enjoy my life.



- Visla Rudiger: The one thing that being kind of the first encounter with this issue brought about was, our HR staff had no idea what they were supposed to ... they tried. Everyone was nice. Everyone tried very hard to use the right name and do the right stuff. But a lot of mistakes were made just out of ignorance.
- Visla Rudiger: There was this document that I remember being shown and they had got it from outside counsel somewhere. So some law firm somewhere thought this was a good idea. And it is probably the most offensive thing I've ever seen.
- Alison Monahan: In terms of how to handle this type of situation or what?
- Visla Rudiger: I'm just going to read you a paragraph from this.
- Alison Monahan: Okay great.
- Visla Rudiger: Because most people have not been exposed to gender transition, it is likely that coworkers will make mistakes. Such as referring to the employee in gender transition by the wrong name or pronoun or asking inappropriate questions. Employees in transition should gently correct a co-worker who makes a mistake. It is assumed the mistakes will be less frequent after a reasonable period of time.
- Alison Monahan: Oh wow. Yeah.
- Visla Rudiger: So it acknowledges that the questions are inappropriate. It uses the word inappropriate but then it tells me that I need to be polite.
- Alison Monahan: It's your problem. You need to be polite.
- Visla Rudiger: Another one was, "Other than the fact of gender transition the employee should not discuss medical condition or procedures with other company employees. Employees should keep medical information confidential. Discussion of such information at the workplace is a breach of confidentiality". What?
- Alison Monahan: Of your confidentiality?
- Visla Rudiger: It's my confidentiality!
- Alison Monahan: It doesn't really make a lot of sense.
- Visla Rudiger: I'm not going to overshare with my coworkers but you don't get to tell me what I get to talk about with people. If they want to know, if they want to talk to me about what I'm doing. I'm not under a gag order.



- Alison Monahan: I think the flip side of that is really more the issue. It's probably impolite for someone to ask you those details.
- Visla Rudiger: That is something that people need to get through their heads. It's not any more appropriate to ask about what's in my pants than what's in any other person's pants. Just because I'm trans doesn't give you license to ask those questions.
- Alison Monahan: I mean for me I think about it the same way that I would deal with a perceived pregnancy. People ask me all the time, "Are you pregnant"? And I'm like "No, I'm not pregnant, you're just offensive". But for me even very close friends who for whatever reason decided not to reveal to the world that they were having a child until the child arrived. I'm not bringing it up it's not my business!
- Visla Rudiger: No. People will tell you if they want to. And it's a wide range of opinions. And another thing that I think a lot of people assume about anyone who's trans is that they are undergoing medical transition. That's not the case. Not every person undergoes hormone therapy. And even fewer people undergo surgical transition. I think the media portrays it as anyone who's transgender is having the surgery and that's the holy grail of transition. And it's not. It's up to every individual.
- Alison Monahan: Now you've arrived.
- Visla Rudiger: It's interesting. So yeah, that's what I encountered. I had a meeting with our vice president and our HR director and I shouted about this document for like two hours.
- Alison Monahan: Did they distribute this?
- Visla Rudiger: No thankfully. Stuff about this was going to be official. They wanted me to sign a document that included these things. I was like "This is profoundly wrong, have you read this"? And once they understood what it said ... cause it uses all the nice language, it doesn't use offensive words. It tries to be touchy feely and nice. But it's not. It profoundly misunderstands the situation and doesn't actually respect the employee in transition.
- Alison Monahan: Right. It seems like it puts it all back on them to be like don't cause any problems, don't make people uncomfortable and if they are uncomfortable and they do say something offensive just pretend that its okay.
- Visla Rudiger: The thing is, I don't get mad at people for making mistakes. Mistakes are going to happen. I answer my phone with the wrong name. I've done it. I've answered my phone with that name for I guess however long I've had a phone. I almost said like 30 years. But I definitely haven't had a phone since I was two.



- Alison Monahan: You probably didn't talk at that point either.
- Visla Rudiger: Probably not. Probably not. But at least 20 years of answering a phone a certain way. And you get used to it. The biggest thing is I give people a break if they're making an honest mistake. You can tell the difference.
- Alison Monahan: You're grandmother's not making an honest mistake she's just being a jerk.
- Visla Rudiger: No she's not. I told her not to and she kept doing it. My biggest thing is like people, strangers. Right after Christmas I was returning a piece of jewelry at a jewelry store. And the employee mis-gendered me. And I was telling a friend about it. And they were like "Oh, it was probably just an honest mistake". And I was like "So you see a person in front of you, wearing makeup, jewelry, lipstick with long hair in a dress. Do you call that person sir"?
- Alison Monahan: I mean if you're not sure, you could just not tell me, you know?
- Visla Rudiger: If you're really really uncertain you can avoid it entirely, it's not that hard.
- Alison Monahan: It almost honestly seems harder to make that point than just to say "Hi, what can I help you with today?"
- Visla Rudiger: Exactly. And there's just no way they weren't doing something on purpose there.
- Alison Monahan: I guess the most charitable explanation maybe they got nervous or something but still.
- Visla Rudiger: Exactly. You get one. If you keep doing it, come on. That's just kind of how I feel about it. But for coworkers like yeah "You've called me my old name for a long time, sometimes you're going to say it wrong. Sometimes you're going to say the wrong pronoun. It's because you were used to it, it's because your brain has a hard time getting this through. You will get there in time. As long as things get better over time, I'm fine".
- Visla Rudiger: I did actually make a formal complaint at one point because people were still messing it up. And I said "Look I don't want to get anyone in trouble. I don't want you to have to sit down with these people and give them a stern talking to, I'll talk to them myself. But I want it noted so that if a year from now this is still going on, I don't come to you and then you say, well you never complained about it before". That's the most that's had to be done.
- Visla Rudiger: Everything else has worked fine. The dreaded ... this document had of course bathroom stuff in it. It actually told me that I was only permitted to use a single



bathroom in the entire building that was a single stall gender neutral bathroom. And I was like "Nope".

Alison Monahan: I actually went to architecture school too, and so much of this is "We could all just avoid this question if we had better bathroom design".

Visla Rudiger: I know It's so, so weird.

Alison Monahan: Anyway lets not go too deeply into that question.

Visla Rudiger: Yeah that's fine.

Alison Monahan: Tell me a little bit about your other experiences in the legal profession. You mentioned that you've been going to court this whole time. How did people react there?

Visla Rudiger: A week or two after I came out, I had to go to court. And it was awful. I badly did not want to put on a suit and go to court. I had not started transitioning at all. I didn't own really any clothes. I couldn't really present as femme really well. So I was just like "Alright I'm just going to throw on my old suit and tie and go to court with my old name cause I hadn't changed it legally". And I went and I won and I came home and felt miserable about it. But I got it over with. And I didn't go to court again for awhile. It just didn't come up.

Visla Rudiger: The next time I went, I had already changed my name legally. I'm sure this varies state to state but anyone who's in my position, honestly anyone who's ever had to change their name, for marriage or for whatever reason you changed your name the bar, at least in Virginia, does not recognize your name change until you change it with them specifically. And it's not even just a form. I had to petition the supreme court of Virginia to give me permission to practice under my new legal name.

Alison Monahan: So this is after you've already gotten a new legal name, that they're demanding this?

Visla Rudiger: Yeah, it was really silly. And I filled out the petition with she and her and I got back an order with he and him. I almost blew up but I did not.

Alison Monahan: Interesting. Very interesting that one.

Visla Rudiger: Yeah I want to just believe it was a mistake but whatever, who knows. Some clerk might just be a jerk. But I got my new Bar certificate and I have everything to practice law on it. So that got changed. But I had to appear before that had gone through, I was like "I filed it. I've done everything I can do. But I'm not



going to stop practicing law while I wait for the supreme court to decide if it's okay to change my name".

Alison Monahan: And how did people react?

Visla Rudiger: Very well. I think this is something that would vary a lot. And it's a sensitive subject with trans people. At least in court attire I pass relatively well.

Alison Monahan: It's very manly anyway for most women's suits.

Visla Rudiger: It's funny. My attire before was super super traditional. You just wear a boxy suit and krinks. I had a whole closet full of gray suits and very boring ties and white and blue button up shirts. My attire since then has been much more colorful. But still I just wore a skirt and a blouse and I think I actually wore a little sweater coat over the top of it.

Alison Monahan: Sounds cute.

Visla Rudiger: It was pretty cute, I was pretty proud of myself. Amusingly I wore the coat because my blouse didn't cover my entire forearm. And one of the other things I did when I transitioned is I have a tattoo that goes all the way up my left arm. And I think honestly, there are people at the courthouse that would have more of a problem with me having a tattoo than whatever my gender identity is.

Alison Monahan: Wear what you want just don't wanna see your tats.

Visla Rudiger: Exactly. I was just okay, cover that up. But no, I had no issues. And everyone was very respectful of...people gendered me correctly. Nobody asked any weird questions. The thing is, court's very transactional. You get up there, you say what you mean to say, they say what they need to say. Everything kind of gets done and there's much less examination of you as a person than you would imagine.

Visla Rudiger: Like you feel very much in the spotlight, but nobody cares anything about you. And the way you're generally addressed in court, like I didn't have ma'am or sir come up at all. They were just like counselor. I wish there was just a gender-neutral, I wish everyone would just call me counselor, that would be much easier.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, too bad you're not a doctor. Then you'd just be doctor whatever.

Visla Rudiger: There's some lawyers that go by doctor.

Alison Monahan: Interesting. I think in court, everyone's playing a role. The judge I worked for, his mother was an actress and when he first came on the bench, she literally



coached him on how to appear more judge like. And he was very different on the bench and off the bench, so yeah it is like we're all just going in and play acting our roles and no one really cares about the individual person at all.

Visla Rudiger: Exactly. So that went very smoothly. I almost ... I was concerned I was going to have to deal with the court as a party, since I'm going through a divorce. And one of the things that I was really concerned with when talking to my divorce lawyer was if I actually have to, if we get contested and have to go through things like that, is the court going to treat me badly, because I'm trans?

Alison Monahan: That' happens a lot with kids right?

Visla Rudiger: Exactly. Exactly. And I'm like, "Am I going to have a really hard time"? And my initial take on that was yeah. If you'll fight you'll lose because you're just going to be mistreated.

Alison Monahan: I would say my non-family lawyer-lawyer today was like "You're going to be at least at higher risk of that happening".

Visla Rudiger: Exactly, but as it happens my divorce attorney has a trans woman lawyer working at her office. And she said if anything the courts have been differential towards her. They're trying hard to make sure there's not even the appearance of impropriety. So that made me feel a lot better. Fortunately it hasn't come to that. I haven't had to go to court as a party but it makes me feel better that the courts are trying. Ideally it wouldn't be that they're bending over backwards for us they would just treat us like normal people.

Visla Rudiger: Given the choice between bending over backwards to appear fair and just flagrantly abusing us, I'll take the former.

Alison Monahan: Yeah of course. Other places you hear about lots of terrible things happening. So they're making a little extra effort to be polite at least, go for it right?

Visla Rudiger: Exactly. That experience has been a little bit different than my girlfriend.

Alison Monahan: Tell me a little bit about that. Cause I know she's also a lawyer, or pending lawyer.

Visla Rudiger: No, no she's a lawyer. She passed the Bar, a little bit later than me. We both practice in the same state, in the same area. She came out during law school. And that made things markedly harder for her.

Alison Monahan: Interesting. Because of the reaction of the schools or for what reasons?



Visla Rudiger: I don't think she had that much trouble in school. It's just that the legal profession in small towns and even in bigger towns like Virginia Beach, is still very conservative.

Alison Monahan: In terms of giving job interviews and things?

Visla Rudiger: Yep. She has literally got through an entire job interview and the person interviewer told her directly "I would hire you if you weren't trans". Just straight to her face said that. That's horrible.

Alison Monahan: Yeah that's not nice.

Visla Rudiger: That's the situation right now.

Alison Monahan: I mean exactly. What's she going to come back with. That's discriminatory? No, you can't. Like we discussed earlier there's not really a clear pathway to that at this point.

Visla Rudiger: And do you really want your first job to be one that you got by court order?

Alison Monahan: Right. You're first job is fighting for your job.

Visla Rudiger: Exactly. I had the benefit of working somewhere that I can tell you, if I had tried to come out in my first job, things would not have gone well.

Alison Monahan: Okay.

Visla Rudiger: I'm sure they would have complied with the laws as they interpreted them. But the coworkers would not have been pleasant. And if I had been out when I was interviewing, I don't think I would have gotten the job. Cause I was reprimanded for growing my hair long.

Alison Monahan: At the first job?

Visla Rudiger: Yeah that's the kind of place this was. I have had long hair basically as long as I was old enough to decide what length my hair was. And the first thing I had to do to get that job was cut my hair. And if it ever got slightly long, they'd be like "No, no. You look like a hippy, cut your hair".

Alison Monahan: That's so ridiculous.

Visla Rudiger: Completely ridiculous but that's what she has had to deal with. Is places like that. And she's just completely open. She's not going to hide anything about it. And that's the kind of reaction she gets. Which is unfair and horrible and I hate



to have to give the advice, but honestly. If you are concerned, and you are not out yet, and it's not killing you. Get a job first.

Visla Rudiger: I hate to say that, I hate to give such cynical advice, but depending on the place you live ... like if you live in an open accepting place, like live your best life, come out as soon as you can, as soon as your comfortable and just go for it. But if you live somewhere where you're worried that it might affect things. Get a first job. Because once you have that first job, and once you have those recommendations, it's much harder to get rid of you then to just not hire you.

Alison Monahan: Yeah that makes me sad to hear you say that. I think that's realistic. There's also a pretty big qualifier in there, "If it's not killing you".

Visla Rudiger: I don't think ... if you asked ... like say my girlfriend ... she would say, "I'm glad" ... it's not worth it. It would not be worth just living in the closet for six years or to get a job or whatever. But lets say you're taking the Bar right now and you're debating what to do. Like "Hey can you hold off for a few months"?

Alison Monahan: Yeah it's kind of like you're going to court once in your suit, but you're not going to keep doing that.

Visla Rudiger: Exactly. It sucked, I went home and cried but it was worth it. Because I am not sure I would have won that case if I had tried to hobble things together and argue with the judge about what my name was in the middle of-

Alison Monahan: Right just slightly distracting possibly. What advice do you have for people who are in these more conservative areas? Do you think it's worth it to stay there and try to make this work? I guess for me. I mean from rural North Carolina I was just like "I gotta get out of here".

Visla Rudiger: I have a lot of friends who have made that choice. Even specifically from rural North Carolina. I know a few people who have moved here to Virginia from North Carolina because of the hostility towards transgendered people. One big piece of advice I would give is consider that if you're taking the Bar, and where you want to take the Bar. Because reciprocity can be really difficult.

Alison Monahan: Consider a UBE state. New York is one of them now. It can't hurt.

Visla Rudiger: Yup, yup. I mean Virginia is very bad about giving reciprocity and therefore is very bad about getting it from other states. So I'm kind of imprisoned here. Unless I want to just completely retake the bar and uproot my life. And I have a kid, it's never going to happen. If I knew earlier in my life, I would have seriously been like "Hmm, maybe I want to practice somewhere else. Maybe I want to go up north or out west".



- Visla Rudiger: If you have the freedom to consider those options, consider them. Because once you settle down and take the bar and pass, and more importantly once you start making connections in the legal community. Law is not a super mobile profession, it just isn't. There's so much you have to learn to move. Even if you're legally permitted to go practice somewhere, you have to retrain yourself so heavily on how things actually work out there. If you can't wait, at least consider where you want to land. And if it ends up being a bad decision you can always change it but at least, make your best first decision.
- Alison Monahan: I would really suggest someone in this area probably should take a UBE state so you at least got 30 options probably more every year.
- Visla Rudiger: That would be fantastic.
- Alison Monahan: Unfortunately California is not among those people.
- Visla Rudiger: Nor is Virginia. I'm surprised New York went that way.
- Alison Monahan: Once New York fell I feel like everyone else is on that pathway anyway. So give yourself options.
- Visla Rudiger: Absolutely.
- Alison Monahan: Well we are way over time.
- Visla Rudiger: It was probably my rambling.
- Alison Monahan: No, no. This has really been fascinating. I guess my final closing question is, and we kind of touched on this a little bit earlier, but what if someone who's listening to this who's like "Okay I'm down with this", like this sounds cool, I'm totally fine with somebody coming to me telling me they're a trans femme non-binary whatever", [what can people do to be supportive allies?](#)
- Visla Rudiger: It's a tough thing to do. But the biggest and most important thing I think you can do, is stand up for us, when you hear things. And not just when we're around. But you are going to hear transphobic things. You may not realize it until you thinking about and start learning about it. But everyday I hear someone say something transphobic.
- Alison Monahan: Really?
- Visla Rudiger: Oh, guaranteed. It ranges from mild to severe but you know, gosh don't turn on any television from the 90's.
- Alison Monahan: I don't really watch TV so I'm probably missing out on all of this.



Visla Rudiger: It's for the best. But if you go watch stuff from earlier, gosh we were awful. But anyway you'll hear people say stuff like this. And it is an enormous help if the burden doesn't have to fall to the targeted person to stand up and say, don't do that, that's wrong.

Alison Monahan: Or hey that's not cool, I don't appreciate that.

Visla Rudiger: If they can hear that from someone they identify with that they see as part of their little group. It's much easier for them to accept it than to hear it from what they view as an outsider, someone that they're already marginalizing. I do my best to stand up for myself and to stand up for my fellow LGBT folks. But it's hard. And it can be dangerous depending on where you are. The best thing allies can do is be an ally even when your trans friend or acquaintance isn't around. With your friends, in your friend group, in your professional circles, when you hear someone use unnecessarily gendered terminology or when you hear someone laughing about some silly bathroom situation, just be like "That's not acceptable, why would you say that"?

Alison Monahan: Yeah like "I'm sorry what"?

Visla Rudiger: Cause as long as people aren't challenged, they'll keep doing it. They don't even recognize it as being a problem. And hearing that it's a problem from someone they respect, goes a long way. We would appreciate it.

Alison Monahan: I think that's excellent advice. So one other question before we close up. Are there some general resources or sources of support that you personally recommend to people who are maybe questioning their gender identity or maybe they know they're transgender, but haven't decided to share that information?

Visla Rudiger: Like we discussed earlier, a lot of the LGBT outreach groups are good. [GLAAD](#) is good. There are crisis lines, there's a [trans life line](#). I'm sure you can throw some of them down on the show notes for people, but there is help out there. And the same with the [legal resources](#), I would look to your [local groups](#). In a lot of cases there are ... [Equality Virginia](#) is one that operates here in Virginia that does a really good job. And provides a lot of really good resources. I have been introduced to a lot of trans support groups and people who can help me through the local [Planned Parenthood](#). Which is not something you would necessarily think about.

Alison Monahan: Interesting, I would not have expected that.

Visla Rudiger: It's one of the number one places you can go for non-gate keeping hormone therapy. They have a lot of resources for trans people. But there is help out there and there are people like us out there, and you're never alone.



- Alison Monahan: Awesome. Any closing thoughts or advice that you'd like to share?
- Visla Rudiger: I don't think I can sum up anything in like a beautiful pithy phrase, but just, live your best life and let other people live their best lives. There's no reason that anyone should be stuck being the sort of person or the gender, or orientation or whatever that they don't want to be. So make it easy for yourself to be whatever you want to be and make it easy for everyone that you know to be whatever they want to be. Because there's no reason to stop them.
- Alison Monahan: I like it. Well thank you so much for your time and insight. This has been really useful and interesting.
- Visla Rudiger: Thanks for talking to me.
- Alison Monahan: Oh my pleasure.
- Alison Monahan: If you enjoyed this episode of the Law School Toolbox Podcast. Please take a second to leave a review and rating on your favorite listening app because we would really appreciate it. And be sure to subscribe so you don't miss anything. If you have any questions or comments please don't hesitate to reach out to Lee or Allison at Lee@lawschooltoolbox.com or allison@lawschooltoolbox.com or you can always contact us via our website [contact form](#) at, you guessed it lawschooltoolbox.com.
- Alison Monahan: Thanks for listening and we'll talk soon.

RESOURCES:

- [GLAAD Media Reference Guide](#)
- [National Center for Transgender Equality Know Your Rights – Employment \(General\) ACLU Know Your Rights - Transgender People and the Law](#)
- [GLAAD Tips for Allies of Transgender People](#)
- [GLAAD](#)
- [Trans LifeLine](#)
- [Transgender Law Center](#)
- [Equality California](#)
- [Equality Virginia](#)
- [Planned Parenthood Trans and Gender Nonconforming Health Services](#)