



Alison Monahan: Welcome back to the Law School Toolbox podcast. Today, we're kicking off a new series: The Law School Toolbox Book Club. This is a chance for us to chat with you about the books we're reading and why you might want to check them out. And today we're talking about [Becoming](#).

Your Law School Toolbox hosts are Alison Monahan, that's me, and Lee Burgess. We're here to demystify the law school and early legal career experience, so that you'll be the best law student and lawyer 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 Girl's Guide to Law School](#). If you enjoy the show, please leave a review or rating on your favorite listening app and 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 would love to hear from you. With that, let's get started.

Lee Burgess: Welcome back. Today we're kicking off our new series the Law School Toolbox Book Club. This is a chance for us to chat with you about what books we're reading and why you might want to check them out. The first book in our series is going to be Michelle Obama's book *Becoming*. I'm sure that most of you listening have heard of Obama's book, even if it is just seeing photos of her from her book tour. Do you remember those incredible thigh high boots that she wore?

Alison Monahan: I do remember those. They were great.

Lee Burgess: Everywhere. And she met with almost every star.

Alison Monahan: The gold lamé.

Lee Burgess: The gold- I know. Yeah. So, her wardrobe choices were memorable, along with a lot of things that she said on that book tour. But we both read the book. But I'll be honest, I listened to the book because I don't have time to read anymore. I just listen to books when I walk the baby around. And we both found it really interesting and thought provoking at times. For those of you who don't know much about the book because you're busy law students, *Becoming* is an autobiography of Michelle Obama's life up to this point. It starts with her childhood in Chicago and follows her through Princeton, Harvard Law, well kind of. She doesn't actually talk much about law school. We'll talk about that in a few minutes. Life as a young lawyer in Chicago at a big firm, her life with Barack, and her journey to the White House and beyond. So, it's quite an interesting read, especially if you're into auto-biographies, which I am. I'm kind of a nerd. I love my good non-fiction.



- Lee Burgess: So, to start it, Alison, I thought maybe we'd talk about our favorite parts of the book, or what did we find interesting about her story and what she chose to share.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah. I think there's so much that's interesting about it. I mean, for me I think I actually liked best the earliest materials about her childhood and growing up on the south side of Chicago and what that was like in this time of transition. It was really interesting to see what a difference, I guess I related to the part about going to the magnet high school because I also went to a magnet high school boarding school and that was fundamentally life changing. And to see that one thing making such a big difference for some people I thought was really very inspirational.
- Lee Burgess: Do you know one of my best friends teaches at that high school now.
- Alison Monahan: Wow.
- Lee Burgess: Yes. At Whitney Young, and yeah, it's very funny. I'm like wow, your school is so famous. I had no idea.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah. Exactly. But I think that idea of you can grow up in a city and then there's this whole other world going on around you and you don't necessarily have exposure. I also thought it was very interesting when she was later talking about working for the University of Chicago as their community outreach. And she said for her Princeton was somehow more accessible than Chicago.
- Lee Burgess: I thought that was fascinating too. And how blinded the University of Chicago had been to this part of their community.
- Alison Monahan: Talent pool.
- Lee Burgess: Yeah. And this talent pool. And I think that's one of the things that her mom had said and I can't remember if this is part of the book or part of one of the articles I read about the book. But somebody asked her mom was she so surprised that her children had been so successful coming out of the south side of Chicago. And she made a comment, there are tons of kids-
- Alison Monahan: I think that was in the book.
- Lee Burgess: Just like mine. No, I'm not surprised.
- Alison Monahan: You have the wrong impression of what this is like.
- Lee Burgess: Yeah. And I think that is really fascinating how we so often overlook these entire populations. I think the legal profession specifically.



- Alison Monahan: Yeah.
- Lee Burgess: Overlooks these talent pools. But I do think that was interesting when she was talking about the University of Chicago as well. And it was some, a bizarre distance of how close it was.
- Alison Monahan: It was literally basically in the south side of Chicago. They have a wall, that it's right there.
- Lee Burgess: Yeah. Yeah. So, there's probably a lot more that we could say about that.
- Alison Monahan: Yep.
- Lee Burgess: But what did you like about it?
- Alison Monahan: What did I like about it? Well I really found her childhood stories interesting. I really thought her discussion of the entire community of the people that were part of her growing up. So, her, I think it was the family member who they both lived in this building together-
- Lee Burgess: I think it was the aunt.
- Alison Monahan: The aunt. And she did the piano lessons, and I thought that was really interesting. But I thought it was such a good discussion of how it does take a village to raise a child and how different people can have such a big impact on someone who's growing up. I mean her parents had a huge impact on her life, but these other important individuals did as well. I really liked her discussions on motherhood. I've talked to other moms. I even have a mom friend who knows the Obamas and she was saying how she really appreciated the dialogue about motherhood. Not only her struggles to become a mom, but I thought she was very honest about how she shouldered the majority of the family responsibilities or balancing her duties and wants for her children and her family with this spouse who is incredibly ambitious.
- Lee Burgess: Right.
- Alison Monahan: And a workaholic, clearly.
- Lee Burgess: Which I guess was good for the country.
- Alison Monahan: Right.
- Lee Burgess: But could be tough to be married to. I loved her honesty around her struggles with the legal profession. How she was kind of a perfectionist and was a box



checker. And didn't really take a lot of time to soul search about what she wanted to do with her life other than be very successful.

Alison Monahan: Right.

Lee Burgess: I thought that was a familiar story.

Alison Monahan: I think a lot of lawyers could probably relate to that. Oh, you're at an Ivy League school and you're doing well and you don't really have a full plan for your life. So why not go to law school?

Lee Burgess: Right.

Alison Monahan: What's the downside.

Lee Burgess: What's the downside. Then you get this big fancy job. I also thought that she had some really frank discussions and thoughtful discussions about race and what it felt like to be one of the few black students at Princeton. One of the few young black lawyers in law firm life. I was shocked by the story of how the mother of one of her roommates at Princeton didn't want-

Alison Monahan: Yeah. That was a little much.

Lee Burgess: Her daughter, yeah, rooming with a young black woman. And I think I was ... it was totally my white privilege talking, shocked that that was happening in the 1980s. I'm sure that many people who weren't living in my white privilege may not have been as shocked as I was. But I found the story very shocking that it happened at that point in our history, just to show how deep-seeded some of that racism was still going on, especially at these elite universities. Coupled with that, she also was very frank about what it felt like to be the only woman in a room.

Alison Monahan: Right.

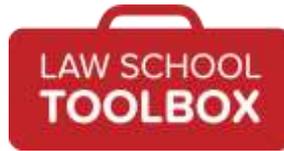
Lee Burgess: Both at these elite universities and then in practicing law. I think many of us have had that experience at being one or one of a few women in the room. And I think she made a really interesting point about learning about that men weren't necessarily smarter, they were just I think the quote was 'emboldened, floating on an ancient tide of superiority, and buoyed by the fact that history had never told them anything different.'

Alison Monahan: Yeah.

Lee Burgess: Yeah.



- Alison Monahan: There's a lot going on there.
- Lee Burgess: There's a lot going on there. But I thought that was really a very lovely way to phrase a reality that many women I think forget, which is that men have been raised with this culture that has told them that they should speak up, and they should be giving their opinions, and their opinions are worthwhile. And I think we're getting better at telling young women that, but I think we still have a long way to go.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah. I was having this discussion recently with someone about whether he had white male privilege or not.
- Lee Burgess: Oh.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah. Can imagine how well that went. But part of the point was you're a mathematician, you have not had the experience of walking into a room and someone thinking to themselves, yeah, he's probably bad at math. Just because of what he looks like. That's not an experience that you've ever had.
- Lee Burgess: Yeah.
- Alison Monahan: That's privilege.
- Lee Burgess: Yeah. Yeah. So I had a lot of favorite parts, but I'm almost done describing my favorite parts of the book. I thought that she had interesting observations about the pressure that was going to be put on her as the first black first lady. That she was going to be scrutinized at a different level, I thought that the discussions about how she'd been scrutinized by her words and comments during the campaign were really interesting observations about how soundbites work and I was just thinking luckily, I'm not in a position to want to be part of politics or married to somebody who wants to be part of politics. But what happens when your words become soundbites.
- Alison Monahan: Right.
- Lee Burgess: And the amount of training and almost studying that you have to do to become this role that they asked her to play. And she didn't like politics.
- Alison Monahan: Right. I actually thought one of the most interesting pieces for me is a takeaway was when she was getting a lot of negative feedback about, you're this angry black woman on the campaign and all these things. And of course, that was totally unfair in a lot of ways.
- Lee Burgess: Right.



- Alison Monahan: And completely loaded with racism and sexism and all these things. But to her credit, she actually went and watched video footage of herself without the sound on. And she kind of looked at it objectively and said, "Well, you know, I can kind of see where some of this is coming from and that's something that I need to work on." Which I thought was so self-aware and brave really.
- Lee Burgess: And then didn't she go demand that they give her a staff to help her.
- Alison Monahan: Exactly. She demanded a staff and coaching and all these things. If you're going to put me out there in this position where I'm going to be criticized, you need to give me the tools. Which I thought was such a great way of approaching this thing which of course is upsetting and not fair. And saying look this is what it is, I see where these possible issues are coming from, some of them, and I need media training.
- Lee Burgess: Right.
- Alison Monahan: If you're going to put me out there as a media person.
- Lee Burgess: Right. That's quite the growth mindset.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah. Really.
- Lee Burgess: It really is.
- Alison Monahan: To an extreme.
- Lee Burgess: To an extreme. But she did step up and ask for what she wanted. And I think it was also interesting how this woman who is incredibly brilliant, I mean she's incredibly brilliant.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah.
- Lee Burgess: Was still really taken aback by some of these roles she was being asked to play and she had to learn how to play these roles. And I think it was also an interesting lesson of academic brilliance or she's clearly a very hard worker. She was good at what she did. She got a lot of accolades for a lot of what she did. And then she was put in this different arena and then she had to get good at that too.
- Alison Monahan: Right.
- Lee Burgess: And admitting that she needed help is incredible vulnerability.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah. I agree.



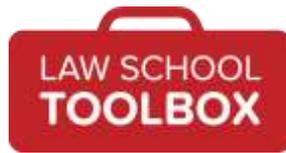
- Lee Burgess: Yeah. I thought the other thing that was interesting was her honesty about the feelings that she always seemed to have about whether she was good enough. I thought that was a theme that was really woven throughout the book.
- Alison Monahan: Right. That's straight perfectionism 101. We can all go back to our Brene Brown on this one.
- Lee Burgess: I know. Which is currently the book that I'm listening to, one of Brene Brown's books.
- Alison Monahan: Maybe that's the next podcast.
- Lee Burgess: But yeah. So I think maybe that's why that really spoke to me because I have been hearing a lot about perfectionism and vulnerability and shame. I know that perfectionism is something that lawyers as a population deal with. So it's interesting how that followed her through the White House and being under such a microscope about what she wore and how she spoke and what she did with her family is really interesting as well. There were just a lot of really, really interesting nuggets in the book.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah, I agree. Absolutely.
- Lee Burgess: And it was also kind of crazy to listen to some of these crazy experiences about living in the White House. I mean, how bizarre.
- Alison Monahan: So she was reading it herself. Did she do the audio book?
- Lee Burgess: She did the audio book.
- Alison Monahan: Oh, that'd be nice.
- Lee Burgess: Yeah. So you feel like you were getting to hang out with Michelle Obama.
- Alison Monahan: 'Cause for me the final part in the White House was somehow a little bit more I don't want to say distant, but I was not quite ... it was kind of like oh this is fun, kind of gossipy. But I felt like it wasn't quite as engaging as the earlier pieces, but maybe if she'd been telling the stories, I would've liked it.
- Lee Burgess: I think it was a little more interesting because she was telling the stories. But I also felt like she had clearly thought so much about her journey to get to the White House, I felt like the way that she laid out that story, it was a beautiful tapestry, a beautiful journey. And then the White House was kind of a bunch of stuff that happened.
- Alison Monahan: Right.



- Lee Burgess: And maybe she hasn't had time to digest it. They haven't been gone for that long.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah. I know that's true. I'm reading [We Were Eight Years in Power](#), which is super interesting. It's a series of eight essays written basically about political stuff. So, I think I just finished year eight. And that was when suddenly everything changed.
- Lee Burgess: Yeah.
- Alison Monahan: So, part of the book is he's going back and reflecting on the meaning of these essays now or how he interprets them or what he's thinking about. And so, it's fascinating to have somebody reflecting on something they wrote in the first year of the Obama administration about the presidency and race or whatever.
- Lee Burgess: Yeah.
- Alison Monahan: From this perspective knowing how this turned out.
- Lee Burgess: Yeah.
- Alison Monahan: I still have the epilogue to go, so maybe there's something to sum it all up in there.
- Lee Burgess: Yeah. There's an interesting documentary called The Final Year, which was they did all the footage of the final year of the Obama administration from a foreign policy perspective where they follow around all the key foreign policy folks as they try and set up their legacy basically, I think is the best way you can say it. And the election happens during that. And not only how it shifts what they were trying to do. They went into this final year with this plan of how do we want to leave the world. Then it was more of what do we do now that everything has changed.
- Alison Monahan: Now that we're in triage mode.
- Lee Burgess: Exactly. So if you want to nerd out on political stuff, there's no shortage these days.
- Alison Monahan: But I think everyone is writing about these sorts of things and has not had enough time to reflect. So we're in this moment and-
- Lee Burgess: Yeah.



- Alison Monahan: It's really chaotic. And we don't really know what's going to happen, even in a couple of years from now. So everyone's sort of like wow this is not really fully reflected upon yet.
- Lee Burgess: Yeah. I think if you are troubled by what's happening in the world, in the political world, it was very interesting to go back and relive some of these Obama era memories.
- Alison Monahan: You're like, oh that was so great.
- Lee Burgess: I know.
- Alison Monahan: I remember when they were in Grant Park and everyone was crying.
- Lee Burgess: Right. I've also been listening to [Ben Rhodes' book](#) which is his reflection on the Obama years, which is also quite interesting. But it allows you to pretend that the world was different for a while.
- Alison Monahan: Well, I mean. Yeah. I think that's like the Eight Years in Power is an interesting one.
- Lee Burgess: Yeah.
- Alison Monahan: And yeah. All those. I mean, everybody's trying to figure it out, I guess.
- Lee Burgess: Yeah.
- Alison Monahan: What does this mean, where are we going, what was this really about? I don't know.
- Lee Burgess: So one of the things though that made this book relevant for us to talk about on the podcast beyond the fact that we thought it was a good book and she's a lawyer is she was very frank about her feelings about attending law school and becoming a firm lawyer and then becoming disillusioned.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah. There wasn't a lot of detail, for example of her time at Harvard.
- Lee Burgess: No, she just kind of skipped it.
- Alison Monahan: She was like, "Oh, and then I went to law school."
- Lee Burgess: I know.
- Alison Monahan: I was like I want to hear more about that, Michelle. Tell us more about that experience.



Lee Burgess: I know. I thought that maybe, because I was listening to it on the audio book. I was like, "Did I skip ahead? Did I miss the chapter on law school?"

Alison Monahan: Yeah.

Lee Burgess: She was like, "I went to Harvard, and then I left."

Alison Monahan: Right. Then I got a firm job.

Lee Burgess: Right.

Alison Monahan: Okay. Well what was that like for you?

Lee Burgess: Yeah. So, I feel that she definitely, let's say maybe that wasn't the most pivotal time for her. Because it's clear that law school didn't speak to her from just the little bit that she wrote about it. And it doesn't seem like the practice of law spoke to her as well. She really seems to have described that taking the LSAT was just what she did because she was still climbing this achievement ladder.

Alison Monahan: Right, the ladder.

Lee Burgess: The ladder. And it was like the LSAT was the next thing on the ladder, and then Harvard was the next thing on that ladder. And then the job at Sidley Austin was the next thing on the ladder and then she was scratching her saying there's no more ladder.

Alison Monahan: Right.

Lee Burgess: Now what do I do?

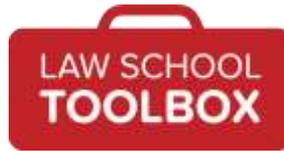
Alison Monahan: Yeah. I think there was a lot of pressure, but also desire on a lot for people who go to law school from a background that's not so privileged, that's part of the reason I went to law school. If I graduate from a top law school, I'll always be able to get a job and take care of myself. Okay, that has value.

Lee Burgess: Right. I think she describes it that she had her office on the 47th floor, she had an assistant, a wine subscription service, Armani suits, and because you can, she bought a Saab.

Alison Monahan: Right. Exactly. Which would be basically the golden handcuffs.

Lee Burgess: Which is the golden handcuffs. Yeah. And she talks about the golden handcuffs in her decisions to shift out of law firm life.

Alison Monahan: True.



Lee Burgess: Because I think when she ... I think the next job she went to was at City Hall with Valerie Jarrett, if I remember correctly.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. I don't remember the exact details. But definitely, that was pretty soon.

Lee Burgess: It was pretty soon.

Alison Monahan: And I think-

Lee Burgess: She took a 50% pay cut. She talks about that.

Alison Monahan: She was with Barack at that point.

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: He was basically making no money.

Lee Burgess: So she all of a sudden went from this big firm job to all of a sudden cutting that in half and then having a public interesting lawyer spouse.

Alison Monahan: Right.

Lee Burgess: I also thought it was funny that every time they had money trouble, he just thought he'd write another book.

Alison Monahan: Well, I mean it worked out okay for him.

Lee Burgess: It did work out okay. Go to Bali to write a book. Also, that part was pretty funny.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. I have to say there were certain things I was like wow, she was very tolerant.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. Very tolerant. I don't know that ... they just got back from their honeymoon and he went to Bali.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. To write a book.

Lee Burgess: To write a book.

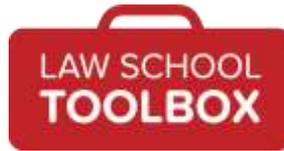
Alison Monahan: And left her alone in Chicago in the winter to work.

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. She really ... she sacrificed. She did.



- Lee Burgess: I guess that's just being aware of who you've married. But I don't know if I would've been as understanding.
- Alison Monahan: No. I did think it was interesting that she seemed very aware of the differences in their viewpoints and mindsets and personalities. And Barack Obama, whatever you think of him, is a very, very unique individual.
- Lee Burgess: Yeah.
- Alison Monahan: Like a very unique background. So, I think for somebody who grew up in the close family, you know everyone, you know your neighbors, you lived there your whole life, it must've been very, I mean interesting, but also challenging to have this person come into your life who's oh hi, I'm really flighty, I've lived all over the world. I'm brilliant, but have all these ideas and I don't really care about money.
- Lee Burgess: Right. And I can just fix problems that come up. I have this deep call to public service and community organizing and then he was so drawn to politics and she wasn't.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah. It is funny after reading the book. Could people please stop asking if she's going to run for office, she's not going to run for office.
- Lee Burgess: No. She clearly does not want to run for office. She hates politics. Yeah. I also thought the fact that she talked about not only their journey to couples therapy, which I thought was incredibly honest, and also her journey to not accommodating him, to building a life that she wanted, especially with her girls, but coming up with some sort of solution that worked for both of them. I think it was about when he would get home for dinner. She was all stressed out about making sure when he was serving in the Illinois Senate, I think it was, that she wait for dinner-
- Alison Monahan: Right.
- Lee Burgess: For him to come home.
- Alison Monahan: When he was late, she was like actually we're just going to eat without you.
- Lee Burgess: Actually we're going to eat at 7:00 or whatever time and if you're home, great. But that's when dinnertime is. And this idea that she wasn't going to let her life be reactive to his.
- Alison Monahan: Right.



- Lee Burgess: Even though they were somewhat at the whim of his schedule. And I thought that lesson probably served her well as he became more and more powerful and his time became more and more in demand. Because she couldn't have just survived by trying to match what he was doing because he was always seemed to be on another plane.
- Alison Monahan: Right. Well I thought the power of her female friendships were really interesting and how much people relied upon each other just for day to day stuff. But also for moral support. That was great how she kept all those people in her life. Took them all to Camp David.
- Lee Burgess: Yeah. That's true. It's true. There was just an article that I shared with, I have a group of girlfriends and we take an annual girls' trip every year that I went to college with, and there was a study out that girls' trips are good for your mental health.
- Alison Monahan: I'm sure.
- Lee Burgess: I'm sure. Well yeah. Now we just feel more justified, we should just go longer. Maybe twice a year. So the other thing that I thought, especially law students would find interesting is how hard it was for her to decide what to do next when she realized that Sidley Austin was not going to be the solution that she had hoped, or the long term solution.
- Alison Monahan: Right. Which I think people forget. There's so much focus in law school about getting that firm job and now you're all set for life. And reality is something like 80% of people leave in the first five years. So almost everyone who starts working at a firm is going to have to address this question sooner or later of well what's next?
- Lee Burgess: And I thought she really was lost for quite a while. She tried journaling to try and find out what she wanted to do. It was clear that she really called on mentors and friends. But I thought that the idea that it wasn't clear and was a meandering career path after that. Because she kind of bounced around and did quite a few different things when she left firm life. She worked for the city and then she worked for the University of Chicago. She was the executive director of a non-profit. Then she was in hospital administration. She definitely bounced around using maybe a similar pool of skills, but her role was not a linear path. Then you could tell it was hard for her when she decided that she could no longer keep that job as the hospital administrator because of the demands of the campaign.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah. I think most people think, oh if I haven't figured it out immediately, I'm never going to figure it out. But you never know. You could end up being in the White House.



Lee Burgess: You never know. And then writing books and wearing amazing boots and outfits and hanging out with famous people.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. Apparently, they translated this book into something like 30+ languages.

Lee Burgess: What?

Alison Monahan: Immediately upon release. Because my book club in Mexico is reading it.

Lee Burgess: Oh.

Alison Monahan: And I had to make sure it was in Spanish. Not only is it in Spanish, it's in a lot of other languages.

Lee Burgess: That's crazy. That's pretty amazing. That shows her international appeal and the Obamas' international appeal.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. And good for her, writing her own book.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. And also, the universal nature of her story. Her coming of age story, that it can resonate with people who have a lot of different journeys. And I follow her on Instagram. And she had a funny Instagram post because she was on the Grammys.

Alison Monahan: Oh, about her mother?

Lee Burgess: About her mother. Did you see this?

Alison Monahan: The text messages? Yes.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. That her mother had a funny text message. She had asked her mom if she had seen her on the Grammys, and she asked her if she'd met any real famous people.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. Did you see any real stars? I'm a real star, mom. Thanks.

Lee Burgess: It's like, I'm pretty cool. People fill auditoriums and I think even arenas to see her at this point.

Alison Monahan: Oh. For sure. The tickets sell out instantly. Everybody I know wants to go.

Lee Burgess: Exactly. So I think one other piece that I definitely took to heart when I was listening to this, thinking about our listener pool was that she failed the bar.

Alison Monahan: She did fail the bar.



Lee Burgess: She did. She went to Harvard and she failed the bar.

Alison Monahan: Yep.

Lee Burgess: I know. So if you're listening, it's okay. Even Michelle Obama can fail the bar.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. No. I think that's a good takeaway because I forgot what she said. She basically didn't study as I recall.

Lee Burgess: No. She didn't take it seriously.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. She did some other stuff. I think there was a wedding of some friend involved or something, or her brother. I mean, it happens.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. And it's a story we hear even for very accomplished people. There are plenty of accomplished people who have failed the bar. But I thought it was an interesting lesson that even she had been such a studious person-

Alison Monahan: Right.

Lee Burgess: For her entire academic career. And then this last ultimate test, she blew off and then she was shocked.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. I thought it was interesting the way she told it in the book too. Because as I remember she didn't bring it up immediately.

Lee Burgess: No.

Alison Monahan: It was kind of like she did her oh I went to law school and I was a lawyer, and then later in the book she's like, oh by the way I failed the bar.

Lee Burgess: Right.

Alison Monahan: So I was like I wonder if there's still some lingering stuff around that.

Lee Burgess: Well, I mean how could there not be? I figure that she hasn't failed a ton in her life.

Alison Monahan: True.

Lee Burgess: I mean I'm sure she's had some failures.

Alison Monahan: I think Hilary Clinton also failed the bar.

Lee Burgess: She did also fail the bar.



- Alison Monahan: Maybe that's how you become first lady.
- Lee Burgess: Be an accomplished woman lawyer and then fail the bar.
- Alison Monahan: Then blow off the bar because you have better things to do.
- Lee Burgess: Well I think that if you're looking for a study break or something to do on holiday, then this book is worth your time. Because it's interesting and she's an interesting person.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah. I agree. I think it's a great story. I think she tells the story really well. I think it's very relevant to law students and lawyers and people who are still trying to figure it out. You don't have to have everything figured out at 22. Your life is not over. You can decide not to take the LSAT for a year. And just being thoughtful really about what she wanted and how that was going to fit into this crazy life she'd signed up for.
- Lee Burgess: Yeah. And how what she wanted and priorities changed.
- Alison Monahan: Right.
- Lee Burgess: I mean, she was a ferociously protective mom of her girls, especially in the public eye. And I thought she was very honest about her concerns about her family's safety and she had nightmares about-
- Alison Monahan: Yeah. That was intense.
- Lee Burgess: Yeah. Things happening to her kids and to her family. And I think as we as women take on all of these different roles as lawyers, as significant others, as maybe mothers that we're pulled in lots of directions. And I thought her shifting priorities were very telling, but also, she was able to be in multiple roles at once. And I think that that was also an important lesson to takeaway.
- Alison Monahan: Well, and I think too thinking of some of these things literally as a role can be helpful for people. I mean, most people get the idea oh, well there are just certain types of people who should be lawyers. Or people just know how to do this. And that's not really true. Even someone like Michelle Obama had to basically learn how to be in front of a crowd giving a talk, it's the same thing as being in court. If you want to be a litigator and this is not necessarily something that you feel comfortable with, that doesn't mean you shouldn't do it.
- Lee Burgess: Right.



Alison Monahan: It means figure out the tools and the people that can help you and then create that persona basically of me as the courtroom litigator, whatever that looks like. And it doesn't have to look like how it's kind of always looked.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. And if you're struggling with your career choices or even in a relationship that you can use different tools to find your path. She used different tools to decide what she wanted to do next in her life. It sounds like she did a lot of informational interviews.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. Exactly. I was like sign me up, there's lots of lots of information. And the thing is it paid a lot off later. She would get the call, "Hey we talked and now I have this thing you might be interested in, you want to talk about it?"

Lee Burgess: Right. Exactly. And then when she had a rocky time in her relationship and she didn't feel like she had the skills to fix that, they went to counseling and they got advice on how to be better partners and I think she definitely seems to have an openness for continuing to learn and push herself, and that is probably why she's been able to be in all of these roles.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. Exactly. I also love the story about her mother who would sneak out of the White House.

Lee Burgess: Oh that was amazing.

Alison Monahan: No secret service protection. She'd go grocery shopping. Yeah. It's crazy. You're like, wow you can just do that? They don't follow you?

Lee Burgess: It was funny. I don't think I know what her mom looks like. I don't think I've ever seen a picture of her.

Alison Monahan: I've seen a picture of her maybe on stage two or three times, maybe.

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: I wouldn't recognize her on the street, certainly not. Which was her point.

Lee Burgess: Right.

Alison Monahan: She's like I don't want to be recognized. I want to have a normal life.

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: I also thought it was great when Michelle started going to her SoulCycle stuff in class or in D.C. and you just turn around and oh, that's Michelle Obama? Everybody's got to be cool.



Lee Burgess: I know. Yeah. I guess I've never lived ... you've lived in D.C.

Alison Monahan: No. No, I did a lot of work in D.C.

Lee Burgess: Oh okay.

Alison Monahan: I was always flying there for depositions and stuff.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. It's just a different world.

Alison Monahan: It's crazy.

Lee Burgess: People run into people doing ... at exercise classes.

Alison Monahan: Oh yeah. I was getting dinner one time and the caravan went by of the soon to be president's motorcade, but a friend of mine who lives in D.C. was like oh that's not the real one because there's one difference with the real one. He's like, "That's the fake one they run around sometimes to confuse people."

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: Apparently, they have three and they drive them around so you never quite know who the real one is.

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: It was weird. I was like, "It's the president." And they're like, "No it's not." Then another time it actually was, it was weird.

Lee Burgess: Oh well. I guess if you want to have run ins with the political who's whos then you just go live in D.C.

Alison Monahan: Did one of our tutors say her kid recently ran into some new politician?

Lee Burgess: Maybe.

Alison Monahan: Alexandria whatever her name is O'Casio-Cortez.

Lee Burgess: Oh really?

Alison Monahan: Yeah. I think one of our tutors said their kid was in D.C. and she thought it was a rock star sighting.

Lee Burgess: Oh. It was AOC.



Alison Monahan: Yeah.

Lee Burgess: That's really funny.

Alison Monahan: She's right there.

Lee Burgess: I mean there are some people that I would have some rock star. I mean if I say Ruth Bader Ginsburg I would be very...

Alison Monahan: I met her. She's really nice. I know she's very small.

Lee Burgess: I know. I have not met her. But I was pretty excited when I met Sandra Day O'Connor back in the day.

Alison Monahan: That'd be cool.

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. We're total dorks.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, we are.

Alison Monahan: I'm very bad with celebrities in general. People would be sitting next to me in New York and they're like, "Oh my God, do you know who that is?" I'm like, "No." Apparently John Malkovich literally ran into me once at Sundance and I didn't know who he was. And that was right after Being John Malkovich had come out and everyone had seen it except me. And they're like, "You don't know who that is?" I'm like, "I have no idea who that is." Like, "That's John Malkovich. He just ran into you."

Lee Burgess: Well I interned for Michael Douglas in college.

Alison Monahan: I mean I might be able to recognize him on the street.

Lee Burgess: I think you'd recognize Michael Douglas.

Alison Monahan: Probably.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. I mean it's The American President.

Alison Monahan: Never saw it.

Lee Burgess: You never saw The American President?



- Alison Monahan: No. We have stuff to do. All right. Well I think with that, we're probably out of time. If you enjoyed this episode of the Law School Toolbox Podcast, please take a second to leave a review and rating on iTunes. We'd really appreciate it. And be sure to subscribe so you don't miss anything.
- Lee Burgess: What if Michelle Obama listened to our podcast?
- Alison Monahan: I dare to dream.
- Lee Burgess: I know. Dare to dream. We love you Michelle. Great book. Thank you. Everyone buy it. If you have any questions or comments, please don't hesitate to reach out to me or Alison at lee@lawschooltoolbox.com or alison@lawschooltoolbox.com or you can always contact us via our website contact form at lawschooltoolbox.com. Thanks for listening and we'll talk soon.

RESOURCES:

- [Becoming, by Michelle Obama](#)
- [We Were Eight Years in Power, by Ta-Nehisi Coates](#)
- [The Final Year](#)
- [The World as It Is: A Memoir of the Obama White House, by Ben Rhodes](#)