Episode 14: Avoiding Disasters In Law School

Alison Monahan: Hello, and welcome to the Law School Toolbox podcast. Today, we're going to be talking about avoiding, or handling, all different kinds of disaster in law school, from blanking on an exam to having your house burned down. 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 you'll be the best law student and lawyer you can be.

Together we're the co-creators of the Law School Toolbox Bar Exam Toolbox, the Catapult Conference, and the Trebuchet Legal career site. I also run the Girls Guide to Law School. If you enjoy the show, please leave a review on iTunes, and if you have any questions, don't hesitate to reach out to us. You can reach us via the contact forum on LawSchoolToolbox.com, and we'd love to hear from you.

And with that, let's get started.

Lee Burgess: Welcome back. Today we're talking about a very entertaining and hopefully useful set of topics on how to avoid or deal with all sorts of different disasters in law school. From totally blanking on an exam to having your apartment robbed, we'll discuss it all. Because sometimes It's inevitable that things are going to hit the fan.

The more prepared you are, the better. So what's the number one problem that constantly afflicts law students? Easy. Oh, the computer problem.

Alison Monahan: Ah, the computer meltdown. How many times have we heard about the computer meltdown?

Lee Burgess: How many times have I had a computer meltdown?

Alison Monahan: Right, or exactly, how many times have I had a computer meltdown?

I mean, It's sort of amazing when you think about it, how much of your life is actually stored on these crazy machines.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. Did you have exam meltdowns or just computer meltdowns throughout the semester?

Alison Monahan: Oh, both. Yeah, I had both of those.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. It's ugly, guys. It's ugly, and it still happens today. Like, it's been a few years since we've been in law school, but especially around exam taking.

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It's not any more stable than it used to be.

Alison Monahan: No, I mean, I definitely, I'm trying to think, had at least, well, I had several like crashes of examsoft, but the worst one was on my Fed Courts exam as a 3L, although ironically, it actually ended up being helpful in the end, because that, you know, sometimes examsoft, which is a software that you use to write your exams in class for an in class exam, sometimes that just crashes.

I mean, it's scary, it's annoying, but it just comes right back up. But in this case, it did not come back up. And it was one of those situations where I think after about half an hour, it did come back up. But luckily I'd had that half an hour to think, and I realized I was absolutely 100 percent wrong in my answer.

It was I think like a 1983 case and either, you know, the defendant was or was not a police officer and that was really critical to the answer and I realized I had totally missed it and was like absolutely going down the wrong path. I mean, I managed to salvage the answer, but honestly, if my computer had not crashed, I'm not sure that I would have actually had time to sit and think about it.

Lee Burgess: That might be the most positive computer crashing story I've ever heard.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, it's not usually a good thing.

Lee Burgess: No, no. My first computer crash in an exam was Criminal Procedure, second semester, first year. I had to handwrite the whole thing. And I remember writing a note at the top of my blue book was just basically saying, you know, my computer just crashed.

Please be kind to me when you read this.

Alison Monahan: Like, yeah, I think the key takeaway is here. You're probably going to have your computer crash during an exam at some point. I mean, there are things you can do. One of the things you can do in advance is you want to test your setup. Well, the first thing you want to do if you're a new law student, So you want to make sure your computer can actually be used on an exam.

I mean, I don't know what it is now, but I know when I was in law school, like, you couldn't use a Mac. You had to have a PC. So if someone, you know, if you had a Mac laptop, normally you actually had to borrow a PC laptop to take your exams, which is something obviously you want to be aware of well in advance.

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Lee Burgess: For sure. And oftentimes, you have to be able to turn off automatic updates and get your machine ready, so that's definitely not something you want to leave to the last minute. Even if you are not a 1L and you've used this exam software before, there may be updates. The registrar will probably send out emails, but do not, like, file that stuff away and say, oh, during reading days, I will work on getting my computer ready.

You absolutely want to work on this stuff as early as possible so you can run the software and find out if there are bugs. The first time I had issues with The exam software on my computer, it actually turned out that there was some application on my computer that was causing it to crash and I kept taking it to the school to fix it and they kept telling me it was fixed and it was only because I used to help people test software before I went to law school that I said I can tell something else is going on methodically went through my machine and finally found out what was, you know, causing the conflict.

So you want to give yourself time to do that and not during your days before exams, which is when I was troubleshooting that problem.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. I mean, basically as soon as they sort of tell you like, okay, this is what you need to download and this is what you need to install on your computer. And here's how you test it.

You want to do that sooner rather than later, because if there's a problem. You know, you want to know about that problem.

Lee Burgess: And usually what happens is if something happens to your computer during the exam, they just basically hand you a blue book and you have to start handwriting things. So, some students get a lot of anxiety about this because we're so far from handwriting.

And if you're one of those people, it might not be the worst idea in the world to do some practice handwritten. Like, don't do a ton, but do one practice exam or one question handwritten just so you've done it. Because you don't want your whole grade to tank. Just because you're forced to write in the blue book.

I remember it was the first time it happened to me and I got handed the blue book. I had this moment of like, if I don't get my act together, I could actually fail.

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Alison Monahan: Right. And like, I mean, you want to bring pins, you know, so you don't, you don't think about the fact that, you know, maybe you want to bring extra pins to an exam that you're planning on typing.

Because you might end up having a handwrite.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. I mean, it's, we don't want to scare you, but you have to think through this stuff and be mentally prepared for it. And that was the first moment I'd ever thought I would actually fail a test. And then I kind of had this, And I just thought of like, well, it's time to get my act together.

And at this point, I'm just trying not to fail.

Alison Monahan: Right. And I think another thing, so did you have your outline of your exam answer on paper or did you written that on your crash laptop as well?

Lee Burgess: Thank goodness I did all of my outlining on paper, so I did not lose that. And that is one of the things we tell all of our students to do.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, absolutely. I think that's absolutely critical. Like in some ways you can think like, oh, it makes sense to go ahead and type the headers that I'll use on my outlet or use in my answer. Just go ahead and type those in as I think of them when I'm planning on pre writing your answer. But that is a terrible idea.

Yeah. Because what if your computer crashes? Now you've lost not just what you've already written, you've also lost your entire plan. And that is basically asking for disaster.

Lee Burgess: And guys, even if you've made it through law school without this happening What was it now, two bar cycles ago? There were all sorts of issues with software in the bar exam.

This is something that can happen at any point in your legal career. So you always want to be thinking ahead of how you're going to handle this, you know, potential disaster. Hopefully you make it through unscathed, but it's possible that you're going to run into some hiccup somewhere and you need to be ready for it.

Alison Monahan: It's highly unlikely you're going to take all of your exams on your computer plus the bar exam and not have an issue.

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Lee Burgess: Ooh. One thing most people don't think about, which happened to someone that I knew sitting for the bar exam is the power strip on her row went out and so her battery died. Oh, nice.

In the middle of the exam. So, she, they, she raised her hand and said, you know, she had an older, you know, laptop. So it only had like 90 minutes of battery. You know, the battery start to get kind of worse and worse.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. And they basically said, sorry. Yeah. I think that's a key point. Like if you're going into, you know, a mission critical exam, like the bar exam, you do not wanna bring in your five-year-old computer that doesn't really hold a charge because you just don't know.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, and I think that's an interesting question because a lot of students feel like they have to buy a new computer going into law school, but then you do have an older laptop when you sit for the bar, so do you think you need to have a brand new shiny laptop to start law school, or should you wait and maybe have a better computer?

Alison Monahan: Well, I think it largely depends on what you have now. You know, if you have something that's functional, I don't think you necessarily need to go out and drop several thousand dollars to have like the most fancy laptop you can buy. I mean, that being said, you do want to have something that's reliable.

And I think this, you know, you want to consider, like, can you get a warranty on whatever you're getting? I mean, when I was in law school, I had the ThinkPad from IBM, which was still made by IBM. And they had this amazing warranty you could buy. Where it would cover like on site service next day for something like three years.

So, you know, I basically bought like the top of the line machine because I didn't have a laptop. Bought a top of the line machine right before I started school and for three years if something happened they had to be at my house or in one time I was actually flying for an interview in San Francisco for a callback interview and my computer died an hour before I got on the flight.

And I called them and the next day they were at my hotel in San Francisco to repair my laptop.

Lee Burgess: That's pretty amazing.

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Alison Monahan: Yeah, I'm not sure you can buy those warranties anymore, but if you can, it's definitely worth considering. I mean, another time they sent someone to my house in New York and, you know, he basically replaced the entire hard drive or mother, I think it was the motherboard, had gotten fried and, You know, just like that, that was amazing.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. I mean, it's, it happens to everybody, you know, tech meltdowns continue to happen. So you just want to have the most reliable machine you possibly can. I mean, I remember when I started law school, I had to buy a laptop because I'd been using work laptops. I'd already had laptops given to me by work.

So I didn't have one. So you might be in a situation where you have to get a laptop going into law school, but you do want to remember that that machine is likely going to, you know, limp you through the bar exam as well. So get something that, you know, we'll have a decent shelf life so it can be reliable whole time.

Alison Monahan: Right, and one thing to think about too, I mean, it's actually a lot easier now because you can store a lot of stuff in the cloud. So, you know, this is another huge issue that we hear about from people is like, oh, I wasn't able to apply for law review, for example because the night before I was supposed to submit my law review essay or an hour before my computer crashed, my hard drive is dead, and I can't access the file.

So what do you say to that, Lee?

Lee Burgess: Oh my gosh, just throw into it. You know, just use the cloud. It's so easy. It's called Dropbox. It's free. Just, just use it. It makes everything better. I mean, it's so avoidable. You know, tech disasters and losing content just isn't like it used to be.

Alison Monahan: It shouldn't happen. It should never, never happen.

Another student the other day was like, oh, I just lost a day studying for exams, because my outline disappeared on my computer.

Lee Burgess: No.

Alison Monahan: I'm like, well, was your outline backed up anywhere? Was your outline in Dropbox? Was your outline in Time Machine on an external hard drive? Did you email it to yourself? What?

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Like, this is, you know, you can't have a single point of failure at this point.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, I know. It's, I mean, this is much different than I remember when I was in college in Southern California. That was when the, the black, the rolling blackouts happened. Oh yes. In California to make myself feel really old. And I was working on my thesis.

And when the rolling blackout was coming to the school, the school got a phone call from PG& E that the power was going to be shut off. And so the first thing that went down was the internet because they would shut down the servers. So nothing would crash. And we would all have, you know, then it was like AOL chat or whatever open.

So the minute the internet went down, everyone's like, save, save, save, because the power is going off in a matter of minutes. And we're shoving in the floppy disks, you know, I mean, it was, I'm not sure why it's got floppy disks. Wow, that was a thousand years ago, but you know, it's not that hard anymore.

It's all automatically done and seamless on your computer. There's no reason why you can't back stuff up.

Alison Monahan: Well, I think that's, that's the real point here is like, you need to have some sort of backup method into the cloud that you don't have to do anything to have it activate. So for example, everything that you save is saved in a folder that is backed up to something like Dropbox.

At that point, you don't have to think about it. But if something happens, you can just go to a web browser in the computer lab and download your outline and print it.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, it's fantastic. So if you haven't done it yet, and I know some people get really freaked out by the cloud that like, what if something happens to Dropbox?

And yes, of course, something had happened to Dropbox. But there are a lot of really smart people at Dropbox who have created some sort of disaster relief plan. So I think their disaster relief plan The relief plan is probably better than yours.

Alison Monahan: So what's that in the background, Lee? Is that a fire truck?

Lee Burgess: That is a fire truck driving by. If my one year old was here, he would be like, ah truck!

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Alison Monahan: Right. And the other thing, I mean, it's like, if you don't trust the cloud, and frankly, I don't think you should fully trust anything. I mean, I don't fully trust the cloud. So I actually have an external hard drive that I back up to.

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: You know, and that's stored in a different location than my laptop typically.

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: So you can get really paranoid about this stuff, but the reality is, you know, you really need to think about it beforehand because when you lose your outline or you lose your law review submission or you lose your take home exam, that's a freaking disaster.

Lee Burgess: Yep.

Alison Monahan: And totally avoidable. No one is going to have very much sympathy for you.

Lee Burgess: No. Totally avoidable. And I think the schools are getting even really stricter on not accepting excuses. I think they always have been, but because a lot of this stuff is avoidable, there's just nothing you, you know, you can do if you say, well, my laptop is stolen and I lost my LRW assignment, my legal writing assignment.

They're going to say like, well, too bad. Why? I should have thought about that. Yeah. Dropbox in your email or whatever.

Alison Monahan: It's not like a judge is going to be like, Oh, okay. You can have another day. They're going to be like, sorry, your client goes to jail.

I mean, that's the reality is like, you don't file stuff on time.

Game over.

Lee Burgess: Exactly. Exactly. So if we haven't convinced you yet, you definitely needed to take technology problems seriously and take these very, very easy steps. To, you know, avoid them. Yeah, things on even your phone. Make sure your iPhone is backed up. Because iPhones are just like computers. And Alison, where is your iPhone right now?

Alison Monahan: Oh, Lee, that's a great question. I wish I knew where my iPhone was. Despite having Find My iPhone turned on, it never came back online after it was stolen on Friday.

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Lee Burgess: Oh, and not even stolen in San Francisco, stolen in Mexico.

Alison Monahan: Stolen in Mexico City. So you want to talk about the realization of, oh my gosh, how much of my life Is on this device.

And there are a couple of things that, in fairness, I did actually do correctly. One, and this is, should be absolutely non-negotiable. I had a password on it.

Lee Burgess: Mm-Hmm.

Alison Monahan: You know, I mean, if you don't have a password on your iPhone at this point. Or your, whatever your device is, add one right now. Like, stop.

Okay, add one. Because reality. Yeah, exactly. It takes two seconds, but you know, the reality is think about how much of your information is on that phone. I have access to all of my email accounts. Once you have access to my email, God knows what you can do. You know, you can send out messages to people saying like, Oh, you know, I'm in trouble.

I need money that's coming from my phone. Like you have to have a password.

Lee Burgess: Oh yeah. And like all of your files.

Alison Monahan: Oh yeah, Dropbox. Think about all these apps. You've got WhatsApp. You can communicate with everybody I know. You've got contact details for every person that I know that I talk to. I mean, there's a lot of stuff on your phone.

Lee Burgess: So password protect all of your stuff because the last thing you need is your identity being stolen as well as your phone.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, and speaking of passwords, if you find you can't remember them we recommend using something like 1Pass. So you just have to remember one password.

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: I mean, we could also talk probably a whole episode about bad password security, but no, like, your bank account maybe shouldn't be like, you know, your pet's name or like, your sister's birthday.

Lee Burgess: Or, you know, the year you got married or whatever.

Alison Monahan: You know, some of these, you need to sort of take seriously.

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Lee Burgess: Yeah. Yes, for sure.

Alison Monahan: But yeah, the phone, think of, I mean, you know, and again, like think about things like, can you afford to buy a new phone if your phone gets stolen?

And if not, you might have to look at sort of insurance options or things like that. I mean, something like renter's insurance, we'll talk about this in a minute, but having renter's insurance is a huge, I mean, it's super cheap. It's like a couple hundred dollars a year, usually. But in the event that something happens.

It's going to make your life so much easier.

Lee Burgess: For sure. So, again, these things happen, but if you can take these little steps to make it completely, you know, keep it from being completely disastrous, it's going to help you stay sane in the midst of everything else you have going on.

Alison Monahan: Alright, well, let's switch gears a little bit and talk about exams because it's another area that's really ripe for problems, right?

Because anything that can go wrong will eventually.

Lee Burgess: For sure.

Alison Monahan: So first let's talk about some basically avoidable exam prep disasters and we'll talk about the actual exam day where things get a little more unpredictable. But I mean, this is a common one. You find out you're, you realize you're totally unprepared and your exam is just a few days away.

What do you do?

Lee Burgess: This is where you, it's triage. This is what we call triage time. I mean, you basically can't sit back and say, I'm going to start outlining the class.

Alison Monahan: Or I'm going to start reading the cases that I haven't read yet.

Lee Burgess: Right. Not a good idea.

Alison Monahan: I have to catch up on the reading. It's like, no, you're, it's way past time for that.

Lee Burgess: We have way gone past that. So I think the first thing you need to do is go find an outline, whether it be. an outline somebody else has for the class, or a commercial outline if that seems right for the class, or your outline if, you know, maybe you've done one, but you haven't actually studied it. But this is all about

just learning the basics of the law, and then to kind of practice applying some of it to hopefully get your act together enough that you can do something on the test, because it's not going to be perfect. But you need to at least understand the big sweeping concepts so you can answer the exam questions and probably work backwards from the exam questions that you have hopefully from your professor. So you can see what's been tested. If you're in civil procedure and you can see that the last 3 exams have covered minimum contacts, international shoe, make sure that's something you know.

Alison Monahan: Right, I mean, it's, it's going to be a rare protest. It does not have personal jurisdiction on it. That's true. So, you know, it's like you This is, this is the 80 20 rule time. You know, this is not the time to be worrying about like, distinctions from the common law of like 1812. This is not like, you don't have time for that.

This is like, do you, can you do like a very basic analysis? Do you have the steps? Then you can even memorize them if you need to memorize them, Or can you bring them in on a cheat sheet if it's an open book exam? And I mean, in fairness, I've had exams I was pretty unprepared for that I actually did okay on.

Lee Burgess: Mm hmm.

Alison Monahan: I mean, not like A plus, but you know, like a B plus level. That's totally doable.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, I mean, this is where exam skills also really play into it. I think if you have good writing skills, you know, you can work with the facts, you can, you're comfortable with the fact pattern, then you can make a lot out of an exam you're not 100 percent sure.

But if you go in and you aren't good at reading the facts, if you don't plan your answer, if you're all over the place with your organization, that's going to be a problem whether or not you are prepared for the exam.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, so let's talk about this one we mentioned earlier. What if you lose your outline like the night before the exam?

What do you do?

Lee Burgess: Oh my gosh, trying, you better get another one. I mean, like, I just can't imagine not having one printed out or call a friend, like, is this like a phone a friend situation?

Alison Monahan: I think this might be like call in your favor time.

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Lee Burgess: Because, you know, you definitely need to have one, but You should have at least one printed out.

You should never not have an outline with you the day before the exam.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I mean, anytime you're working on anything, whether it's a legal writing assignment, you know, a submission for the law review, I mean, a take home exam, I mean, I would make a habit basically every hour or two just to print out what I had so that, you know, in the event, God forbid, something happened, at least I was only going to lose an hour's worth of work.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. It's so true.

Alison Monahan: Oh, but yeah, what a nightmare.

Lee Burgess: This, this podcast is actually turning into being like a really stressful thing for me.

Alison Monahan: I know, I'm getting really stressed out.

Lee Burgess: We're gonna have to do some like deep breathing exercises after we're done with this recording, so like calm down.

Alison Monahan: Yeah.

Lee Burgess: Oh what if you just didn't memorize stuff?

Alison Monahan: Yeah, it's a closed book exam and you realize like, oh, I don't really know this. Well, I mean, time to make some mnemonics and memorize them like as quickly as possible.

Lee Burgess: As quickly as possible. And again, start with the heavily tested stuff. I think what happens when people have to go in and triage and you're kind of in this panic mode is you, you get pulled off into the details.

You know, you're like, I don't understand this nuance. It's like that nuance might not be tested, but again, minimum contacts will be tested on civil procedure, so make sure you know that and make sure that the stuff that you're spending time on is actually going to be tested.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. I mean, I remember I just, there was a student in CivPro and I was a TA or something who was asking these questions at like, I don't know, I had never

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heard of, and like my fellow TAs had never heard of, and cases that like barely even mention of it all, and we're just like, what are you doing?

You don't understand subject matter jurisdiction. Like, yeah, this is not what you need to be focusing on.

Lee Burgess: Yep.

Alison Monahan: Oh.

Lee Burgess: Okay.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I'm getting really anxious.

Lee Burgess: I know. Well, we can, we can move on to maybe some funnier stories. I mean, there are definitely exam disasters that happen, but also can be very unavoidable, but you should just like, think about them.

Like don't oversleep. You know, set multiple alarms.

Alison Monahan: Or ask your roommates to wake you up if you're not awake.

Lee Burgess: Exactly. I lived alone and we had a really early exam once. And so we had a phone tree. So we all talked to each other in the morning at like seven to make sure everybody was up. Like figure it out, but don't ever let yourself oversleep and don't stay up all night.

Voluntarily, but if you, you know, if you're an insomniac and have trouble sleeping, you need to have an arsenal of ways to cope with that.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, sleeping pills. Trust me on this one. I did not have them my first set of exams, and even though I had allocated eight hours of sleep every night, I was getting maybe four hours of sleep.

And I was a complete mess by the end.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. So, but again, don't experiment with things like that during the exam.

Alison Monahan: No. Definitely not.

Lee Burgess: That is something you want to, you know, work with your doctor to figure out well in advance of the exam.

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Alison Monahan: Well in advance because different, different drugs have different effects on different people and you do not want to be like in a groggy, like post sleeping pill haze for a law school exam.

Lee Burgess: You know, I've also had students experiment with attention deficit disorder on an exam and they have not had them all semester. I also think that's a mistake. A, mean, of course, you need to go work with your doctor on this. But, don't use the exam time to, to change medications like that, if it's it's avoidable, because then they felt very sluggish on an exam.

They haven't felt like themselves, and that's not what you need when you only have a few hours to perform. So just make sure that, you know, you feel good about getting you know, how you're taking care of yourself going into the exam time.

Alison Monahan: Whatever your, whatever your medication regime is, get that sorted out in advance.

Lee Burgess: That's right. You know, and then some people just totally panic in the exam, and this is where you have to have some coping skills. I mean, this is where I tell people to get up, go to the bathroom, throw water on your face, and take some deep breaths, and then remind yourself that you don't want to fail.

And just go do something.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, see, I think that's the opposite for me because I remember the first exam I had that was like a sort of it wasn't really graded, but I read the question. I was like, okay, I kind of get it. And then I made the mistake of getting up before I started writing and going to the bathroom and I came back and I was looking at this blank sheet of paper and I totally flipped out.

Lee Burgess: Oh, interesting.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. So my, my theory on this is like, you never want to leave the room until you've written something,

Lee Burgess: Even if it's like just like a header.

Alison Monahan: I don't care what it is, like there was something about coming back and looking at that blank sheet of paper That made me totally flip out and I've never had that reaction on an exam in my life.

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Lee Burgess: I can see that Yeah, I mean, I think you have to you know, constantly be asking yourself. What works for you and sometimes I think- See now there's another firetruck going by.

Alison Monahan: California.

Lee Burgess: California right now. But I think you have to really know what's working for you and what you need to give that space.

You know, when you panic during a practice test, this is where you practice these skills.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, these are skills. I think that's a key takeaway. Some people are like, Oh, I'm just, you know, I get test anxiety. I'm bad at tests. It's like, that may be true. This may be something that you struggle with more than someone else.

But there are techniques that you can use, you know, things like you know, we have friends that do like mind over bars or sort of mind, mind training for the bar exam. And, you know, they're pretty easy techniques in terms of like breathing, but also visualization and just recognizing what's happening.

That if you understand that test anxiety has traditionally been a problem for you, this is something to deal with before your first law school exam.

Lee Burgess: Mm-Hmm. Exactly. And to practice these skills while you do your practice test. You know, I'll have students tell me, well, I was doing a practice test, but I just got really anxious and so I stopped.

Alison Monahan: Oh yeah, that's useful.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. And I'm like, no, you have to practice continuing to work because you can't just abort in the middle of the exam. So, you know, you can do things before the exam period to kind of prevent these situations from happening or give yourself the skills. To make it better. You know, also just make sure that you are doing the entire exam.

We have heard from students who missed a question, which is really disappointing because you get no points for missing a question. So make sure you look at the whole exam so you know what's going to be tested.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, and a lot of this you can do in advance too. Like if you can ask your professor, you know, typically they're perfectly willing to say, okay, the exam is going to be three questions and they'll each have two parts and if you And then

you start working and then you think, oh, I only see two questions with two parts.

Isn't that weird? Well, bonus for me. No, not bonus for you. You're probably missing something. You need to look at the whole thing.

Lee Burgess: Exactly.

Alison Monahan: And it's not out of the question that, for example, like the proctor has handed out the wrong exam or the proctor hasn't given you all the pages. So, you know, hopefully they announce like you should have X number of pages, but just look to see if you actually do.

Lee Burgess: And then Alison, I think you and I both had this situation where the professor used an old question that popped up on the test that in my class people had seen it before. Some people had seen model answers and some people hadn't, but the question had been circulated and I think you had a bit of a different situation, right?

Alison Monahan: Yeah, my con law exam, my professor was like 150 years old and didn't really understand shared drives on computers, so he didn't realize that he had. You know, that someone had uploaded, and it was relatively old, it was eight or ten years old, but they'd uploaded as a sample exam, plus model answer, a question that he reused, and so it was an open book exam, and it wasn't like the most obvious question, like, you know, you kind of had to dig around in the archives to print it, but this was Columbia, people were diligent, you know, half the class had printed this answer.

And so, you know, it's this huge thing. Like, what do they do? Because people start freaking out during the exam and then afterwards, I mean, basically what he ended up doing was just making up people's grades, to be honest, but, you know, in that scenario, basically you need to notify the proctor or like, say you think someone's cheating and you probably have an obligation to notify the proctor, you know, or if you think they've handed out the wrong exam, they have a way to get in touch with your professor.

So, I mean, there was a situation in school where, you They handed out like the wrong torts exam. Not, I wasn't in that class, but you know, they, they, the proctors switched the classes. So, you know, anything that seems really weird, don't ignore that sensation. I mean, maybe you're wrong and the professor's like, nope, sorry, that is your exam.

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But if you're right,

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: Ugh, what a nightmare.

Lee Burgess: I know, it's such a nightmare. And I think the last thing, though, about that is if you have one exam that turns into a disaster like that, you have to be really careful and not let that taint your other exams. I mean, I know on my contracts test, which is where the, this answer was reused.

I mean, people got really, really derailed.

Alison Monahan: Oh yeah, people are flipping out about this con law thing. I mean, for like days on end, like meetings with the dean and blah, I was just like, I don't have time for this. Like, I have other exams to take.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, and actually our dean sent out an email to the students being like, you guys need to calm down.

You have other exams, like knock it off.

Alison Monahan: Honestly, I think ours was the opposite. They were like, it's come to our attention that this horrible thing has happened, and we have no idea what we're going to do about it, but we might make you take a different exam, which just made people flip out even more. I mean, they handled it really badly.

Lee Burgess: That's really poorly. Okay. Yeah. Well, so. Regardless, bad things will happen, but trust your gut. If you feel like something fishy is happening or you think something's wrong with your exam, say something. Take the 30 seconds to talk to the proctor. It's worth it.

Alison Monahan: Right. And I think this, this takeaway about like not letting you get too derailed, you know, is applicable more broadly as well.

I mean, I've heard of students, for example, who were accused of cheating on a test and that ruined the rest of their exams. And, you know, that is not fun to be accused of cheating. And that's something you have to deal with. But, you know, the school's not going to be too sympathetic, probably, if you come back and you say, well, I should get better, I should get extra points on my later exams because you accused me of this.

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Not going to happen. Like, you have to find ways to sort of forget about the exam that's happened. Another thing, I mean, I say never, ever, ever, ever discuss them after the fact.

Lee Burgess: No, a hundred percent.

Alison Monahan: There's just no point. It's like rehashing that is not going to help you. Oh, enough about exams. I think I'm going to have an anxiety attack.

Lee Burgess: Okay. So. Alison and I have had a lot of, like, crazy stuff happen in the last couple weeks, but it's been a good reminder, which is why we are doing this podcast today on this topic, that stuff's just going to happen. Like life happens and there's nothing you can do about it.

All you can do is kind of be aware that things are going to happen and roll with the punches as well as you can. So, starting with the beginning of law school, Alison, didn't you have like a blackout or something happen?

Alison Monahan: Oh yeah. Yeah. Yeah, we're sitting in like the first day of orientation and suddenly the lights go out.

This is New York City, like a couple of years after 9 11 in, you know, September, August, whatever it was. Lights go out. People who lived in New York freaked out. Could have been there for a couple of years. And I think the internet was actually briefly up because they had a, they had a backup server or something.

But yeah, it was the, it was the New York City blackout. We had no power for like three days all over Manhattan.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, it's not good.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. I mean, I just moved to New York. I had these new roommates. We just moved there. I mean, you know, I think we had like one candle between us. We had, you don't think about it, you should, but anywhere you're moving, like you need to have a minimum of like a flashlight.

I mean, we had nothing.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. By your bed. My mom is always a big. Proponent of having a flashlight next to your bed.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. These are things, yeah, it's just things think about it could be fires. Like there are fires in California right now, earthquakes, snowstorms, blizzards,

rainstorms, tornadoes, whatever it is, you know, wherever you live there's something bad that's probably eventually going to happen or could happen.

And you know, just thinking in advance, I mean, in California it's sort of expected that you have an earthquake kit. But I had never thought about that anywhere else, but it's a really good idea. You know, some food, some water, flashlight, first aid supplies, you know, information that you need, contact numbers for people.

These are things that the more you think about in advance, you know, when you get that knock on the door, which has happened to me when I was studying for the bar exam, you get the knock on the door from the firefighters saying the building next to you is on fire. You need to evacuate right now. You know, and you're like, I'm studying for the bar.

This cannot be happening, and it is happening. And you have that moment of like, oh, my God, what do I bring with me? Yeah. Where's my passport? I have no idea. Yeah. Where is Okay. I'm bringing my laptop. And I'm bringing like one book. And that was what I took when I fled my house.

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. Yeah. But like, I could've had a bag ready to go with all of my supplies in it, you know, of like, pay important documents or whatever, because you know, the reality is like, the stuff happens and it happens quickly. You know, it's not it's not great.

Lee Burgess: No, and then other like things happen, you know, family members get ill. My dad had pretty serious surgery around the time of my first year exams. My first year exams, which was a little stressful, but luckily everything was okay. But that that's hard, you know, you don't want to worry about a family member when you're trying to cope with law school, but you don't get that choice.

And you just have to do the best that you can and reach out for the help that you need to get through it. And, you know, you can't, life continues to go on. You can't save life.

Alison Monahan: Right, I mean, you know, for example, when I was, I had a clerkship. And the weekend of the first week that I had worked, I got a call saying my father had died.

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You know, I wasn't even in Boston where I was working, I happened to be in New York. And it's this moment of like, I have no contact information other than like the email for the judge that I work for.

He's not checking his email until Monday.

Lee Burgess: Right.

Alison Monahan: Like, how do I get in touch with him? You know, and these are, you know, one of the takeaways here is like, you always want to have your important numbers.

A, stored in your phone, but as we've discussed, your phone might disappear. So stored somewhere else. And by important, you know, it's everything from like the dean of the school to your professors. Like if you need to contact your professors in an emergency, you know, you need to be able to get in touch with them and you might not have your phone.

Lee Burgess: Or you might be sitting in a stoplight and like Alison and I were last week, was that just last week or a week and a half ago, I guess?

Alison Monahan: Week and a half ago, I think.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. A week and a half ago we were sitting at stoplight in San Francisco and two cars in front of us collided and one spun into us doing lots of damage to my car.

Luckily, we were okay, but then your cars just disappear. You know, and it's like, you're told to clean out your car. Actually, there was a nice woman at the scene who made a good point of like, to take everything out of your car, because you don't even know if you're getting your car back. Right. And and then we're standing on the side of the road with like, all of my junk from my car, like,

Alison Monahan: Going, what do we do we do now?

Lee Burgess: It's like, my car is being towed away. It does not work, you know, the police are here, and then we just left. And so I think, You know, stuff like that does happen, but you just have to think, like, yeah, do I have all of the information? You know, is my car insurance current so I can, you know, handle that?

And then your car disappears.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, because my car, ironically, I found out when I was in San Francisco that my car insurance was not current because they had been mailing me renewal notices to my home address when I had been in Mexico for three months. So,

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for example, you might want to make sure that all of your really important bills that they either get paid automatically or they email you about them.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, especially in law school where it's very, very easy for things to fall through the cracks, especially if you're moving around a lot. You know, if you're, Moving from a different city, mail forwarding can be kind of shady, so you don't want, like, financial drama to, you know, be a downer.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, and little things.

It's like, you know, you're not gonna, I mean, insurance, I'm a huge fan of insurance at this point in my life. You know, so that when my bag got stolen in Mexico, at least I could be like, well, I have travel insurance, so I'm pretty sure they're gonna pay me for most of it.

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: And yeah, rental insurance, huge if you're in law school, like you're probably renting.

Yes, you don't have a lot of money, but what are you going to do if your house actually burns down?

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: You know, like rental insurance will cover your stuff, it will cover finding, you know, paying for a new place to live, like, you know, hopefully you never need any of this, but I mean, a friend of mine, for example, got robbed at gunpoint.

In Oakland and her rental insurance covered everything.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. It's pretty amazing.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. So, I dunno, what are some like options here? I mean, I'll, I'll give you my list of things I've learned the hard way, or things in fairness that I have done correctly. Right. One thing have multiple credit cards, and do not carry all of them. Mm-Hmm. . So, you know, when my bag got stolen, at least I had two extra credit cards at home. So I'm not completely without access. To, to, you know, being able to buy stuff like, right. Oh, all the stuff that got stolen, . And also consider having multiple bank accounts. Like I used to always do this.

I kept at least two bank accounts and I kept the ATM cards in separate places. Mm. Unfortunately I got mad at Bank of America a while back and canceled that

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account. But otherwise, I would have had no problems. I would have, like, right now, I literally have no access to cash. That's a problem.

Lee Burgess: That is a bit of a problem.

Alison Monahan: Yeah.

Lee Burgess: Important to, you know, have, make a copy of your passport so you always know your passport number if you need it and your driver's license-

Alison Monahan: And one thing I've learned recently, do not think that just because you have taken a picture of your driver's license on your phone that you actually have a copy of it, because I literally, at this point, do not know my driver's license number.

Lee Burgess: Oh, that's not good.

Alison Monahan: I know. Yeah. Yeah. Not great.

Lee Burgess: No. And use your community, you know, make sure that you have friends that have keys to your house.

Alison Monahan: So, right. For example, you went to my house yesterday, in fact, and let yourself in.

Lee Burgess: And and as soon as you get back, I'm sure you will have keys to my house.

Alison Monahan: You know, it's like whose keys do you need? You know, I had a situation once where the guy was dating disappeared for three days and he'd recently moved. I didn't have keys to his house. I thought he was dead. I called the cops.

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: You know, like it would have been a lot easier if I'd just been able to let myself in and see that he wasn't dead.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. But it's good to have to rely on your community. So if you have friends, you know, that you can swap keys with, it's very good. And if you don't, you know, having a spare key at your house and a lock box or something like that can also be. Yeah.

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Alison Monahan: Just think about like, it doesn't matter what it is. Just think about how am I going to get in my house if my keys are missing?

Lee Burgess: Yeah. Keeping, you know, we talked about like the. An earthquake or an emergency kit maybe even including some cash in that. So if you need to go buy something and you have no credit cards or they're not working.

Alison Monahan: Or if your wallet gets stolen and your ATM card is gone, wouldn't it have been nice if I'd had more cash on hand

Lee Burgess: Exactly.

Alison Monahan: Luckily I did actually have, you know, $70 of dollars. So that's what I'm spending right now.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. And then I think planning of how you're gonna connect with people in a event, in a disaster event, you know, what's your goal for your family and friends? So you can find each other, which is also important. You don't need to be, you know, creepy and compulsive about this and be one of those people who talks about disasters all the time, but it's worth thinking through just so you can find people.

Alison Monahan: Well, because I mean, nobody knows anyone's phone number now.

Lee Burgess: I know.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I know, like, I know my mother because, like, that's the same phone number we had. Other than that, I literally don't think I know anyone's phone number.

Lee Burgess: I know my husband's. I know my dad's. So you're better off. I don't know anyone's. I know part of yours because it's the same digits as somebody else's.

Alison Monahan: So the point being, like, you want You want to have multiple ways to access this sort of information in the event that you really need to.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. Okay. So I think we might've stressed out everybody a lot by this podcast, but the point is, is that, Stuff happens and we hear Mercury is going into retrograde.

I'm not sure if that's going to be when this podcast is released, but you know, apparently more crazy stuff could be coming. We don't know.

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Alison Monahan: Well, and just more stuff is coming down the pipe as like things get crazier in the world. Yeah. More fires, more floods, more everything, more storms.

Lee Burgess: Yep. So just, you know, a little bit of planning can make it so you can ride out the turbulent realities of life.

Alison Monahan: And for the love of God, back up your word.

Lee Burgess: Yes, that too. Okay, we hope you've enjoyed this episode of the Law School Toolbox podcast, even if we did stress you out just a teeny tiny bit. If you enjoyed this episode of the Law School Toolbox podcast, please take a second to leave a review and rating on iTunes.

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