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Minnesota Shaped Me

My semester at the University of Minnesota Law School was one of the most enjoyable, educational, and challenging parts of my education. I paradoxically came to understand the Swedish legal system better than I had done before, gained a much deeper understanding of American society, and the knowledge of academic English I acquired has been essential for my future career.

Fantastic professors in American constitutional law, international law, and bankruptcy law served as a true inspiration and injected vitality into my interest in law during the final years of my education. The Socratic method of teaching, which Uppsala at the time had recently adopted, was truly perfected in several of the courses I took in Minneapolis.

Studying law in a Common Law system provided me with a bird's-eye view of the Swedish legal system. When I explained to my American friends the differences between the Swedish and American systems, I came to understand, in a way I hadn't before, how the Swedish legal system was structured. I began to see the forest and the overarching legal principles instead of all the trees and details.

I also gained a completely different understanding of American society. My Swedish values were confronted with an American mindset. The course "Obligations to Life," which was a combination of law and philosophy and dealt with abortion, euthanasia, and animal rights, was particularly challenging. Each course module began with a battery of questions about what we as students thought was right and wrong. For me, the questions about abortion were an eye-opener for the difference in the public debate in Sweden and the United States. The questions were what was morally right or wrong – they ranged from whether it was morally right to have an abortion for someone who had been raped to if

it was morally correct for the parents to choose abortion because the child had the “wrong” eye colour. As a Swede, and a staunch advocate of the right to free abortion, I initially answered that all reasons were morally acceptable.

The professor calmly asked me if I truly believed it was “morally right” to have an abortion because the parents preferred a blue-eyed child over a brown-eyed one. I thought about it and responded with a no, realizing that a woman’s unconditional right to make decisions about her own body did not necessarily mean that I always believed those choices were morally right. Respect for the right of others to choose also means respecting choices that I would not make myself.

In hindsight, I’ve realized that the incredibly fun semester I had in Minnesota was pivotal in my decision to join the foreign ministry. Partly because my time in Minneapolis gave me a taste for working in other countries – landing somewhere and building a new life and daily routine. Partly because the semester made me feel confident in my academic English skills, enabling me to use English as a working language without any difficulty.

The parties, friends, endless days of tennis, and student life were fantastic. But my time in Minneapolis was not just a lot of fun; it actually played a significant role in shaping where I ended up in life.