

Bar Bulletin

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Profile / Amanda DuBois & Lucia Ramirez Levias

Not Every Path to Law Looks the Same

By Caitlin Copple Masingill

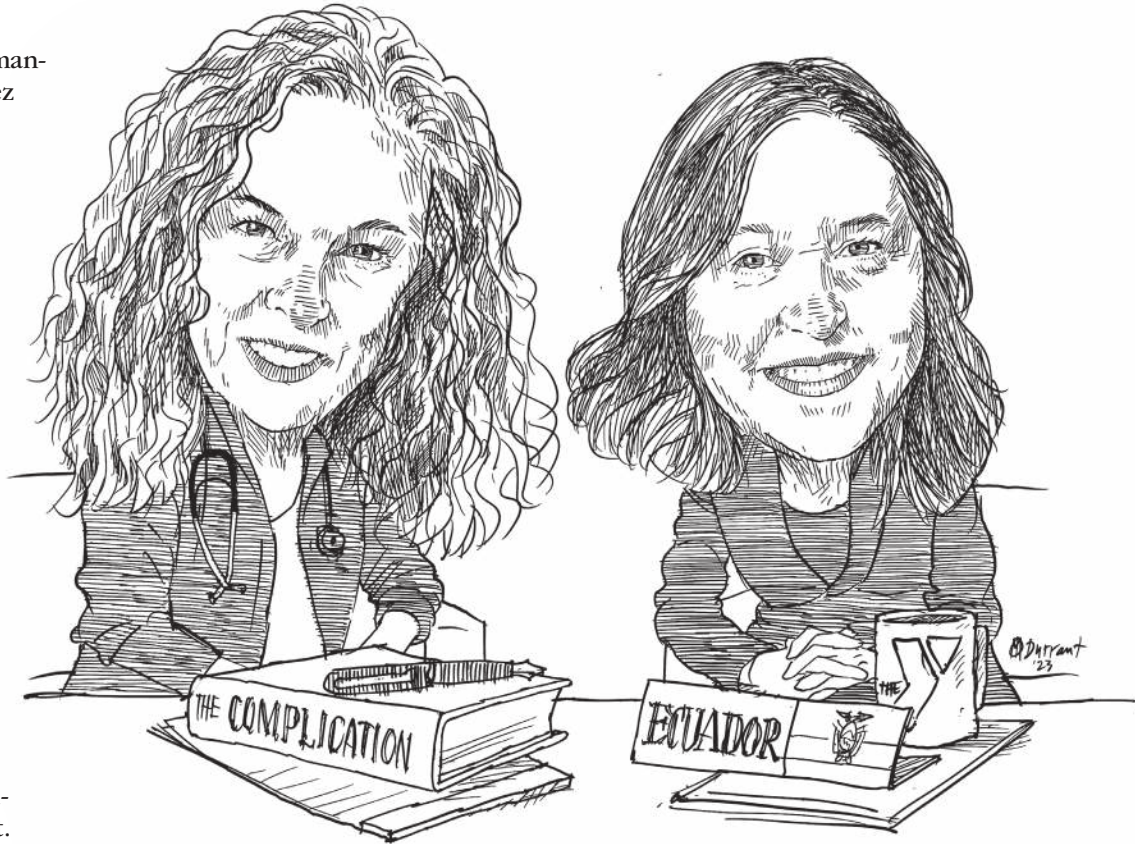
For family law firm partners Amanda DuBois and Lucia Ramirez Levias, unconventional career paths into law are nothing new.

Amanda DuBois. Amanda started her career as a high-risk pregnancy and delivery nurse at the University of Washington. Then, about 30 years ago, she took the leap into a new career path in law. After graduating from the Seattle University School of Law (at the time, University of Puget Sound), she entered the field as a trial lawyer. She witnessed inequities in how individuals could access the legal system. Coming from the world of medicine, where every life was considered precious, Amanda found the legal system frustrating, especially in how the lives of women, the elderly, and even children were simply not valued in the personal injury context.

Her solution? Writing a mystery novel and starting her own firm, not necessarily in that order.

At a time when few people really cared — or even knew about — access to justice in the legal system, Amanda believed that the power of storytelling could bring more attention to issues like abuses of power, discrimination against women and the elderly, and how lives should more properly be valued in our system.

Amanda's debut novel, *The Complication*,¹ tells the story of the fictional character Camille Delaney, a Seattle attorney much like Amanda herself. Camille risks her career to investigate a dangerous case involving two surgeons who



seem to be responsible for the deaths of numerous individuals. Camille's adventures give young women attorneys a role model while pointing out flaws in how the legal system values human lives. While the book came out last year, the actual writing of most of it happened in fits and starts over the past two decades.

The second book in the Camille Delaney series, *Deliver Them From Evil*,² is scheduled to be released in April 2023, and a third in 2024.

Amanda donates the entirety of her book's proceeds to social justice causes such as the Civil Survival Project, the nonprofit she co-founded to help formerly incarcerated people as they come home to

their communities. She also directs book proceeds to the Full Circle Scholarship, a scholarship she created and funded at the Seattle University School of Law to provide tuition support for students who have been impacted by the criminal legal system.

Amanda co-founded the Civil Survival Project after learning about the barriers faced by people who have served time as they try to re-enter society. Amanda became motivated to do her part to change oppressive laws and policies, particularly by coaching those most impacted to advocate for the reforms they think would be most effective. She echoes the thoughts of Glenn Martin — a formerly

incarcerated leader — “Those closest to the problem are closest to the solution, but furthest from the resources.” The Civil Survival Project has trained advocacy skills to more than 400 individuals and supported groups of formerly incarcerated individuals as they testified in Olympia, at City and County Council meetings, and at Washington State Supreme Court symposia. In the past couple of years, the organization has added a direct legal services division.

Amanda believes that she has benefited from the organization just as much as the participants. When asked about the success of the Civil Survival Project, Amanda said: “I now count as friends some of the most amazing individuals who have re-created themselves after prison. Some have graduated from law school or received advanced degrees, some are professors, and some are students. And all are passionate activists dedicated to helping those still in prison, and those who are working to re-enter the community. I could not be more proud of these colleagues. They inspire me every single day.”

As a law firm owner and practicing family law attorney, Amanda uses her background in law, nursing, writing, and social justice, to serve her clients. After experiencing great frustration in her personal injury practice, she found a home in family law. For Amanda, family law is not unlike labor and delivery. The client is in deep pain, very afraid, and is reaching out for help. The big difference is that in labor, everyone knows they will have a baby and all the pain will be worthwhile. In a divorce, the client doesn't always know that they are giving birth to a new life and while the transition will be painful and scary, the life that they will create will be well worth it.

Now, 20 years later, the firm has two offices and a team of nine female attorneys working exclusively in family law. When hiring, she looks for individuals who are compassionate and fierce. And having come from the medical world, where no one graduates from medical school and is ready to practice medicine,

Amanda finds it critical that every new lawyer be partnered up with an experienced lawyer who can teach and lovingly support them much like doctors get mentored during their residency.

Lucia Ramirez Levias. In October 2022, Lucia became a named partner of the firm, now DuBois Levias Law Group. Prior to attending the Seattle University School of Law, Lucia worked at the Greater Seattle YMCA as a Youth Development Director. She created and ran evidence-based programs to support teens in Seattle. During those years, Lucia also started an organization called Reel Grrls, a video production program designed to empower young women to realize their talent and influence from behind the camera.

Lucia then moved across the country to Washington D.C. to work at the Ecuadorian Embassy. She was responsible for helping manage international relations between the U.S. and Ecuador. Lucia says that the time she spent studying and traveling to Ecuador gave her a close look into the intricacies of international relations and later inspired her to work with parents that are foreign-born, live overseas, or have interstate and international custody issues. Her pro bono work focuses on helping children who arrive in the U.S. without a parent and need to be cared for by a relative.

In 2008, Lucia met Amanda and discovered what was then DuBois Law Group. At the time, Lucia was practicing immigration law and even worried that family law might be too depressing for her. But Amanda's firm had a more hopeful approach — they believed that divorce wasn't an ending, rather it was a beginning. Lucia started as a contract lawyer in the summer of 2008 and quickly found great joy in helping families transition from some of the darkest moments in their lives to some of the happiest.

Lucia prioritizes mitigating the negative impacts that divorce can have on her clients' young children. She uses well-researched de-escalation techniques and opts for mediation over going to trial whenever possible. Lucia is driven by a

belief that a caring attorney can be the difference between a traumatic experience and one that can create a better future for the children involved.

As a named partner of the firm, Lucia is looking forward to continuing to coach young attorneys. Unlike some firms, DuBois Levias makes a point of giving their attorneys hands-on (but carefully observed and guided) experience in the firm. Amanda and Lucia provide a rigorous training program that places new lawyers with more experienced lawyers. The new DuBois Levias Law Group lawyers get lots of mentoring before they ever take a case on their own. And when a new attorney is ready to go to court, Amanda and Lucia and their entire team are constant cheerleaders, providing feedback afterward and always being an open door for questions.

“I got really valuable mentoring from Amanda when I joined, so being able to continue to do that with our newer attorneys is really exciting,” said Lucia. “What makes the firm unique is that we have an opportunity to grow our own attorneys here. We hire talented, smart lawyers very early in their legal careers and then mentor them for a year or two before they handle their own cases.”

Amanda and Lucia have high hopes for the future. For the past two decades, DuBois Levias Law Group has helped thousands of clients navigate one of the most difficult challenges of their lives and come out on the other side with hope for their future. They plan on continuing to recruit and mentor legal professionals who have had unconventional paths into law, and in doing so they are leading the charge in changing what it means to practice family law. ■

Caitlin Cople Masingill is the founding partner of Full Swing Public Relations. She works to uplift the voices of under-recognized leaders as they rewrite the human story.

¹ <https://www.amandadubois.com>.

² <https://www.amazon.com/Deliver-Them-Evil-Camille-Delaney/dp/1954854692>.