

Smooth Sailing for Lisa McLaughlin '81

Alumni Spotlight by Kent Halkett '81

Lisa Edelmann McLaughlin '81

still remembers a difficult but fascinating assignment she received from Professor James W. Ely Jr., to research the testamentary documents of Tennessee's earliest residents at the state archives. Reading original source documents, she learned about the very real perils of life in Tennessee before it achieved statehood in 1776. One man's handwritten will began: "I, having been scalped five days ago, hereby leave..."

Lisa had earned her undergraduate degree in history and business at Duke University and relished the opportunity to do historical research during law school. Since earning her law degree, Lisa has forged her own impressive history as a successful lawyer, including work with Big Law, in a corporate legal department and founding her own firm.

Born and raised in St. Louis, Missouri, Lisa arrived at VLS with her Duke friend and sorority sister, **Margaret (Meg) Adams Hunter '81**, who was her law school roommate. Lisa gained practical courtroom experience working at the legal clinic launched in 1980 by **Sue Kay '79**, joined the staff of the *Vanderbilt Journal of Transnational Law* and received the Stanley D. Rose Memorial Book Award.

After graduation, Lisa returned home to St. Louis and joined the tax department of Bryan



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Cave Leighton Paisner. Her focus soon shifted to nonprofits and estate planning; she became a fellow of the American College of Trusts and Estates Counsel in 1996.

After 17 years at Bryan Cave, Lisa joined the in-house legal staff of Bank of America in St. Louis. But much to her pleasant surprise, her clients continued to seek her out, and she returned to private practice two years later. In 2015 she opened a St. Louis-based boutique estate and wealth planning firm, MGD Law, with two colleagues. She is a managing member, and seven of the firm's nine attorneys are women.

Lisa and her husband, Bob, met as undergraduates at Duke. Bob is retired from a career with IBM; their two children, Laura and **Scott (VU'13)** are both attorneys. The McLaughlins are avid sailors, a hobby they

enjoy on family vacations that often include stops at local archives where Lisa pursues a lifelong interest in genealogy that started at her grandfather's knee. She is chair of the Missouri Historical Society.

VLS has always been close to Lisa's heart. She interviews prospective students through the alumni interview program, gives student talks about her legal practice and volunteers as the Class Agent for the Class of 1981. She recalls working "incredibly hard" in law school and has maintained lifelong friendships with Meg and other classmates. She finds it gratifying that so many of her peers went on "to make meaningful differences in their communities." Her classmates say the same about her!