An Inclusive Interview

Equity in Justice

with Jamshed "JJ" Jehangir



The mission of the State Bar of New Mexico's Equity in Justice Program is to cultivate and grow a legal profession in New Mexico that is representative of and reflective of the people of New Mexico. As part of that mission, we bring you the series "Inclusive Interviews." We call these *inclusive* interviews both as a play on words and as a contrast to the term "Exclusive Interview."

Because legal employers with inclusive hiring and employment practices have a bigger talent pool from which to hire and access to a larger client base, these interviews serve to amplify that growing and cultivating inclusivity and belonging in our profession is beneficial to all legal employers; be they private firms, government entities or nonprofits.

This *Inclusive Interview* is with Jamshed "JJ" Jehangir. JJ has been practicing law for two and a half years and is currently a solo practitioner, Public Defender Contract Attorney, and member of the committee for the Rules of Criminal Procedure.

Q. What is your background?

A. I grew up in the west suburbs of Chicago where my childhood was consumed by a love for music. I played percussion in my high school's wind ensemble, orchestra, and jazz band before attending the University of Miami in Coral Gables, Florida, to major in music performance. After my first year of college, my interests shifted, and I found a passion for ultra-distance endurance sports, history, and literature. I also met my future wife, Cheryl, who was a fellow musician-turned-academic (we have now been together 16 years!). Upon receiving my undergraduate degree in history, I accepted a commission as an officer in the United States Marine Corps and spent my time in service in Quantico, Virginia, and San Diego, California. Following the Marines, I enjoyed a few years working at bakeries, bike shops, and doing other fun gigs before enrolling in law school at UNM. After receiving my Juris Doctor diploma and passing the bar in 2023, I spent a year at the public defender, and then clerked for Justice C. Shannon Bacon at the New Mexico Supreme Court. I started my own practice in Fall 2025.

Q. What made you want to become a lawyer?

A. One of my duties in the Marine Corps was to review non-judicial punishment documents for my boss, who was chief of staff of the unit. I mostly reviewed the legal documents for form, but my boss would often ask for my thoughts on whether the recommended punishments were fair. I always found myself advocating for the individuals who were in trouble and trying to understand the alleged incidents from their perspective. I genuinely enjoyed the work, and it felt important to argue in favor of the accused. I am not certain this fully made me want to become a lawyer, but it definitely sparked my interest in the law and put law school on my radar. I think my reasons for actually applying to law school and becoming a lawyer may be less interesting, but not altogether uncommon: I was looking for a new career, enjoyed reading and writing, and had access to the GI Bill to fund three years of education, so law school made sense.

Q. Who is your hero in the legal profession? Whose career or work do you wish to emulate?

A. I am the product of a handful of dedicated professors who shaped me as a lawyer. Thus, I would say my legal heroes are every law school professor who shows up day after day and year after year teaching their subjects with passion, enthusiasm, and skill. I do not want to emulate any specific person's work or career, and instead hope to forge my own unique path. To be sure, I will be influenced by the myriad lawyers, judges, and justices I admire.

Q. What has been the biggest challenge in your legal career?

A. This may seem odd, but I am very proud of my reputation at the jail. I have had inmates tell me that other inmates told them that I am a lawyer who will pick up the phone, come visit, and ultimately do a good job on the case. These are the reviews that matter most.

Q. What is your favorite part of your current position?

A. I struggle with disconnecting from work once the day is over. I often go to bed thinking about a case or legal issue, and wake up thinking about it. I know this inability to unplug is not a virtue, nor is it sustainable in the long run. It has literally made me lose my hair.

Q. What is your advice for new lawyers from diverse backgrounds? What do you wish someone had told you when you were starting your legal career?

A. Your background is your strength, so lean into it, not away from it. And you are not only wanted in the legal profession, but you are needed. I wish someone told me it is OK to start your own practice early in your career if you feel ready.

Q. What 3 things would you take with you to a deserted island, and why?

A. I would take (1) my Crockett and Jones "Harvard" loafers in dark brown shell cordovan, (2) mink oil (to keep them properly conditioned, of course), and (3) a shoehorn (to avoid creasing the heal counter). Look, for the most part I live modestly. For example, I drive a 2000 Mazda B2500 pickup truck with well over 200,000 miles on it and a disintegrating interior. But I admittedly indulge in nice dress shoes. They change the way you walk through the world, and if I find myself on a deserted island, I still want to carry myself with confidence.

Q. What is something the legal profession in New Mexico can do to be more inclusive?

A. In struggling to answer this question I recognize that I likely take certain privileges for granted. I know other members of our profession deal with issues, hardships, and barriers to entry of which I am blissfully unaware. So, my answer is for the bench and bar to listen and act when members of the profession share their thoughts, feelings, and ideas for improvement regarding inclusivity. If I had to offer one tangible idea, I think it would be great if the law school offered a class on starting your own law practice. Many folks, including individuals from diverse backgrounds, do not fit the new-attorney paradigm of becoming a clerk, public defender, prosecutor, or joining a large firm. Rather, they can best flex their unique skills and practice in their field of choice—and geographic location of choice, e.g., rural—by starting their own practice.

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