

## Women of Legal Tech: Practicing Law in a Life on the Move

Heather Clauson Haughian learned how to practice law wherever her Air Force pilot husband was based, including in England, where she passed the British bar exam.

By **Monica Bay**

There's a shortage of women in science, technology, engineering and math. And there's still a 17 percent gender gap in pay—across the board—in all of legal (18 percent at Big Law). But within the legal technology community there are many women with thriving careers. Monica Bay interviews [Heather Clauson Haughian](#), 45, of Culhane Meadows Haughian & Walsh PLLC.



**Current job:** I am a co-founder, managing partner and chief technology officer at [Culhane Meadows](#). In 2013, I started the firm with three other founders. We are cloud-based. Our firm is a certified women-owned business, based the U.S., servicing worldwide clients from small to large companies. The 54 lawyers at the firm are all partner-level attorneys (no associates)—comprised of 22 women and 32 men.

**Education:** Murray State [University](#), Bachelor of Science in Environmental/Chemical Engineering, 1995. [Northwestern School](#) of Law of Lewis & Clark College, J.D. 1995-1997. [Duke University School of Law](#), visiting student, 1997-1998. U.S. certification from the [International Association of Privacy Professionals](#). Admitted in Georgia, the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office and the Courts of England and Wales.

**Home base:** From a work perspective, I am “based” in at our Atlanta office. I serve as a managing partner. However, I’m married to Shane Haughian, an Air Force pilot, so my home base changes every two years. Currently, home is in Niceville, Florida ([Eglin Air Force Base](#)). This June it will be [Little Rock AFB](#).

**Did you consider a career in science, technology, engineering or math?** I started out as an environmental/chemical engineer working at the Department of Energy. I was working with DOE attorneys frequently and was fascinated, so I decided to go to law school.

**First paid job?** During high school, I worked as a certified nurse assistant. I thought I wanted to be an orthopedic surgeon specializing in sports medicine (after all my sports

injuries). A wise friend's mother advised me to get more exposure about being a physician. I changed my major from pre-med to engineering.

**What was your “first seat at the table”?** In 1994, I was working as an engineer (one of two women on a team of 20). We finished an environmental impact assessment at an Air Force base, and had to report results that the upper brass were not going to be happy to hear. Because I had helped reprogram the software, my manager (a male engineer with 20+ years' experience) asked me to lead the briefing, despite the protocol that senior engineers [must be] present. His example taught me that no matter how senior you are, or how much experience you have, sometimes you should defer to junior people. That hungry young employee may know more on a subject or have a different perspective. Their good work as part of your team reflects well on you and builds incredible team loyalty.

**First obstacle and how you overcame it:** I met and married my husband (a Special Operations pilot in the Air Force), which meant transfers every two to three years. Our first assignment was in England. As the expat spouse, I had only two options: 1) take the British bar exam and practice as a solicitor at a British law firm; or 2) make a daily commute of three hours round-trip to work in the London office of an American law firm. So I passed the British bar exam and practiced as a solicitor in England. For two-plus years, I handled large-scale technology/ outsourcing deals, but more importantly, I learned how business is done in Europe and how cross-border transactions actually work.

**Most flagrant sexism you encountered and how you addressed it?** In high school, an assistant football coach took me under his wing to make me become a stronger player. He put me on a weight lifting and plyometrics training program. The other coaches scoffed at him, saying that he was “wasting his time with this little girl.” I was already 6 feet tall, so the comments cut hard. Most of the football players just rolled their eyes at me, saying girls didn't belong in the weight room. That made me work even harder, so I could earn the beloved T-shirt given only to those who can box squat more than your body weight.

I proved them all wrong. I got that T-shirt, and by the end of my senior year I had gone from being an all-district basketball player to an all-state player. After I graduated, I heard the women's high school basketball coach, Dennis Chapman, started all the players on a weight-lifting program that next summer.

**Who was your most important mentor?** In England, as a solicitor, I worked on an outsourcing deal for Eastman Kodak Co. It took a year-plus to negotiate; I worked closely work with [Susan Wylie](#), Kodak's in-house counsel for Europe, the Middle East and Africa. She had more influence on me than she could imagine. She taught me about negotiation styles, knowing your audience and that sometimes you must change your communication style to get the best result for the client.

**Advice for young women:** Never lose your integrity and always take the high ground even when it comes at a price. Staying true to your word may result in a temporary

setback and you may be tempted to use a shortcut, but in the long run maintaining your integrity will lead to success, whether in business or personal life. If you want to be strong leader (no matter your age), you have to earn people's trust. To do this, you must maintain your integrity.

**Five favorite technology tools:**

- [Samsung](#) ("Talk-to-Text").
- [Wunderlist](#) (manage work and personal projects and to-do lists).
- [Grammarly](#) (excellent grammar and spell checker).
- [MightyText](#) (send texts from your computer).
- [Audible](#) (Amazon's audio books).

**Book that inspired you?** "[Wonder](#)," by R.J. Palacio. I read it with my 9-year-old daughter, Lexi Haughian, so we could talk about it. (It was my mom's idea. [Haughian's mom, Vicki Clauson, was a teacher.]) The book inspired me with how courageous the little boy was in spite of massive adversity. For example, the book's teacher taught: "When given the choice between being right or being kind, choose kind." A good lesson for mom and daughter who both like to be right.

**Favorite charities:** [Special Operations Warrior Foundation](#) and the [Wounded Warrior Project](#) because of having experienced firsthand what it's like to see active-duty members sacrifice their lives, their bodies and often their minds for love of country only to come back home without resources to truly take care of themselves and/or their families.

**Your mantra:** Be authentic in all that you do and remember that attitude is everything!

**Favorite quote:** "At the end of the day people won't remember what you said or did, they will remember how you made them feel." — *Maya Angelou*

---

**About Culhane Meadows – *Big Law for the New Economy*®**

The largest woman-owned national full-service business law firm in the U.S., [Culhane Meadows](#) fields more than 50 partners in seven offices across the country. Uniquely structured, the firm's Disruptive Law® business model gives attorneys greater work-life flexibility while delivering outstanding, partner-level legal services to major corporations and emerging companies across industry sectors more efficiently and cost-effectively than conventional law firms. Clients enjoy exceptional and highly-efficient legal services provided exclusively by senior attorneys with significant experience and training from large law firms or in-house legal departments of respected corporations. *U.S. News & World Report* has named Culhane Meadows among the country's "Best Law Firms" in its 2014 through 2018 rankings and many of the firm's partners are regularly recognized in *Chambers*, *Super Lawyers*, *Best Lawyers* and *Martindale-Hubbell* Peer Reviews. *Law.com* included Culhane Meadows among the Top 7 Innovators of 2017.