

Meet Aisosa Osaretin



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WILLIAM H. BOWEN
SCHOOL OF LAW

If Bowen gave an award for the student who traveled the longest distance to be here, Aisosa Osaretin might just win. A native of Benin City, Edo State, Nigeria, Aisosa and her family immigrated to Minnesota almost four years ago—a year before she arrived at Bowen for her 1L year.

Little Rock may have been new to her, but her determination to go to law school was not.

“In Nigeria, students test for placement in programs. Though I wanted to go to law school, I was placed in Philosophy.”

After graduation, Aisosa completed her compulsory service in Nigeria’s National Youth Service Corps. During training, Aisosa met corps members from different parts of Nigeria.

“I had lived my entire life in Benin City. My tribe, the Bini tribe, is the major tribe in the Edo State. Service in the NYSC included all tribes, so there was a lot of diversity.”

After training, NYSC members serve in a state where they have no connections (either family relationships or educational background). Aisosa is from South Nigeria, so she was sent to the eastern part of the country. She was assigned to the legal aid corps, which represented those who couldn’t afford legal representation and educated the community about their human rights. She also had a job working in the local government council’s office, akin to a U.S. mayor’s office. She worked under the litigation officer.

“It was a wonderful experience. I was exposed to different cultures—dress, language, music. I met people from all over Nigeria and made lifelong friends.”

Those experiences rekindled Aisosa’s passion for law school and exposed her to human rights issues.

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When her parents immigrated to Minnesota in July 2016, she moved with them. She took the LSAT in December that year and began applying to law schools. “I didn’t know much about many states, but I wanted to explore outside Minnesota so I applied to a lot of schools.”

Several schools accepted Aisosa, but there were delays in getting her transcript from Nigeria. “Through it all, Bowen worked with me. I had a sense that they cared about me

coming, and it gave me an idea of what school would be like here.”

There was also another benefit.

“I checked the weather. It was a definite plus.”

Aisosa arrived in Little Rock in August 2017 to pursue her law degree. After her first semester, she decided to pursue a concurrent JD/MPS degree with Bowen and the Clinton School of Public Service.

While Aisosa was eager to start her legal education, the transition wasn't always smooth. “I never thought about being in a school without other Nigerians,” she says. “My parents helped me move here and returned to Minnesota, and that was the first time in my life I'd been truly alone. I had only been in the U.S. for a year, so there was still a communication barrier. Everyone asked me to repeat myself. No one got my name right.”

She considered transferring at the end of her first semester but, in the end, decided to stay.

“Little Rock is a lot like Nigeria. There is a lot of interaction.”

There were also other bright spots.

“I thought about my experience in Nigeria—wanting to get into law school and being told to study something else.”

There were mentors and friends, too.

“Professor Sarah Jenkins was a mentor and someone I could talk to. She helped me with a lot of things,” Aisosa said. “Bowen's chapter of the Black Law Students Association also helped. Whenever I was alone, a member encouraged me to join them. It wasn't just a strategy. They cared about me and my experience.”

She now has a “Nigerian Network” in Little Rock. “There are two Nigerian students at the law school.”

This summer is her International Public Service Project at the Clinton School, something she has been looking forward to doing. She is hoping to work in either Sri Lanka or Ghana, since both have ongoing work in human rights. “Ghana would be like a second home for me, but I have never been to Sri Lanka. I never understood the advice to travel outside your own country until I did it. It makes you more open minded, and it is wonderful to learn about so many cultures.”

The love of learning is a common theme in Aisosa's experiences as a student. Her favorite law school class so far was Professor Steinbuch's Business Associations class. “It appealed to me because it turned out to be surprisingly interesting,” she said. “The class was small and very interactive. We discussed a lot of current topics, and you knew you were going to get called on. You had to be prepared.”

So far, Aisosa has worked at Windstream, the Sandford Law Firm, the Prosecuting Attorney's office, and the Destiny Law Firm. She also volunteered with Clark Tucker's campaign. She's currently working with the Buchanan Firm, and will be clerking with the Arkansas Department of Health this fall.

For her Clinton School practicum, she's working with the Children's Advocacy Center of Arkansas, specifically on child sex trafficking. She's doing research and drafting best practices in the Arkansas area to identify victims and help survivors.

“You think it couldn't happen around

you, but then you realize that it's right next door.”

This winter, Aisosa was crowned Miss Nigeria International in Minnesota. “I was doing well in school, and I could compete without damaging my studies,” she says of the decision to participate. “It was fun. I was around so many Nigerian women who were academically accomplished. It was a competition, but we were all there for each other. I was ready to embrace whoever won, and when it was me, all the contestants were supportive.”

Her pageant forum focuses on human rights advocacy, especially on the aspect of women as pawns in conflicts.

Aisosa will graduate with her JD/MPS in December, and she's not opposed to staying in Arkansas. “I'm taking the Arkansas Bar exam,” she said. “I have a larger network in Arkansas than in Minnesota.”

She's hoping to focus her future practice on intellectual property and patent law. To help with her technical understanding of potential clients' needs, she's taking biology and chemistry classes at UA Little Rock.

“Life right now is a dream come true,” Aisosa said. “The people I've met and the places I've worked have opened so many doors. It makes me believe I can accomplish what I want.”