



Power of Attorney
A Rutgers Law School Podcast
Host: Kim Mutcherson, Co-Dean Rutgers Law School

Interview with Charles Ray RLAW'10
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Kimberly Mutcherson: Hi. My name is Kimberly Mutcherson. I am the Co-Dean of Rutgers Law School on the Camden Campus. Welcome to the podcast! And I am absolutely thrilled to have with us today, Charles Ray. He is a 2010 graduate of the Law School, here in Camden. He has amazing stories to tell so we're only going to get bits and pieces of them but Charles, welcome to the podcast!

Charles Ray: Thank you Dean Mutcherson for having me.

KM: Absolutely! Um so I want to start at the beginning a little bit, recognizing that we're going to have to skip some of the interesting bits in between, but so um you are born and raised in Camden, NJ.

CR: That is correct. Born and raised in Camden, NJ. Um, really never stepped foot outside of the city until really, college. Uh, yeah so born and raised East Camden, Cramer Hill. Graduated made a clean sweep of all the schools so H.C. Shrep School for elementary, Veterans Memorial for middle school, and Woodrow Wilson High School for high school.

KM: And who'd you grow up with?

CR: Uh. In terms of –

KM: Who raised you?

CR: So, uh, my mother. Single parent. You know, a unfortunately typical scenario where it was my mother and she had eight of us. So a pretty big household, and you know she did the damn thing.

KM: Yes!

CR: Because we all turned out pretty well, and uh I grew up with my mother. She was my primary care giver.

KM: Fantastic. I'm sure she's incredibly proud of you, as we all are. Um so I was remembering in anticipation of this conversation, your story of how you went from Camden to college, which is extraordinary, and started I believe with you as a little kid getting a you know hand-me-down jersey basically, from LSU.

CR: Yes. That is correct.

KM: Right? And not even recognizing what LSU was but kind of liking that you had this jersey. And that really set you off on this amazing journey.

CR: Yeah. So it's a really interesting story. And in the interest of time I'll just kind of give the highlights but essentially, yes, I received a sweatshirt from my mother. And I believe she acquired it from a thrift store. I believe it was called Village Thrift. I could be wrong about that.

KM: Still exists.

CR: And this shirt basically read 'LSU Tigers'. At the time, I didn't realize that LSU was an acronym, so I called it 'Lasue Tigers'.

(Both chuckle)

CR: And I loved the shirt so much, I kind of became infatuated with anything that was LSU or 'Lasue'. So I wanted an LSU Tiger for a pet, even though I didn't – again - know what it was. I also, just really wanted to be affiliated with it so once I found out that it was a school - in fact the gentleman who told me it was a school, his name was James, he said it was a "school for big kids". And he just planted a seed in my mind that I wanted to go to this school for "big kids".

KM: So how old were you at the time?

CR: That would have been second grade.

KM: Ok. So like, eight.

CR: Yeah.

KM: Maybe seven or eight. Ok, so you're in second grade, you discover the LSU Tigers, you're super excited to become a big kid so you can go to LSU.

CR: And get more LSU apparel.

(Both laugh)

KM: So you go all the way through. You know you do grade school, you do junior high, you go through high school. And go through high school in a city where it's not a given that kids are going to go to college. Right?

CR: I would say that yeah there are some unfortunate truths. I think my experience at ten, kind of, one was, as I said, growing up in a single parent household. I know that's not the case for everyone. It was the case for us. And then you know the high school that I went to. I went to Woodrow Wilson High School which I think very fondly of. It had your, you know, typical spectrum of inner city outcomes. So you had children who excelled. Who went on to do great things; go to college. You know obviously make a gainful living for themselves. You had others who opted, sometime of their own volition sometime of, you know, because of course the forces around them to pursue other avenues of maturation. So, you know, yes I was lucky. I was able to apply to and get into LSU, which was my first school. It was my reach school. That wasn't a term back then.

KM: Yeah.

CR: So it was the only school that I really wanted to go to. And so I got in and I – it's not so much that I took it for granted, but I certainly had a naive amount of confidence that that was going to be the outcome. And part of that naiveté, I believe, helped make that process less dramatic for me. It was kind of, I just coasted into the next phase of my life.

KM: Yeah. So you went from Camden to LSU, which was maybe the farthest place you had traveled?

CR: Yes. I was a track and foot athlete in high school. So we did track meets where we traveled to various parts of New Jersey, obviously going to the Penn Relays. And then for our class trip we went to Colonial Williamsburg.

KM: Yep.

CR: In Virginia. But yeah that was as far as I had been. I'd certainly never been on a plane before. So

yeah so going to LSU was quite an adventure.

KM: Fantastic. So you went to LSU. You were successful at LSU. You graduated from LSU and then you decided you were going to be a lawyer.

CR: So no. The decision to become a lawyer was probably right around the same time I decided to go to LSU. So as a young man I, for whatever reason, had these ambitions that were really they couldn't have passed until much later in life. One of them was going to LSU, again I didn't really have a sense of what "big kid going to school" was but that was just an aspiration. I also wanted to be an attorney. And so those were statement I was making before I got my first diploma from fifth grade.

KM: And what was appealing about being a lawyer?

CR: So it's a little bit of a funny story. I remember the portion of it that to me strikes me as humorous. It may be a little bit more complicated than this in its actual genesis but essentially, you would only ever really hear people speak with any great prestige about the professions of medicine, law, and engineering. So everyone would say, "I want to be a doctor – a lawyer – an engineer" and that just seemed like something I heard various times in my youth. And so it was really, for me, a process of elimination that I did not want to be a doctor. And again, based off of what I knew a doctor to me is someone who likes being at hospitals who is going to have these individuals examine you, or draw blood, or give you needles. So I didn't want to be part of that experience. At the time, I had a very naïve sense of what an engineer was. I only knew them to be individuals who conducted trains who you know –

KM: Right.

CR: made the trains go. And again I'm trying to capture it based off of that understanding. Obviously, I've learned better since then.

KM: Sure.

CR: But at the time that was my very naïve sense, my very narrow sense of what an engineer was. And as cool as I thought trains were, I didn't want to have anything to do with that because – and this is the honest to God truth and it makes me feel foolish for even saying it out loud – but I didn't want to be an engineer because trains couldn't turn. (*Laughing*). And so it was basically like you can't turn left or right if you're driving a train and I just thought that was very confining. And, again, I think back and it's amazing how strong of a sense that was for me because that was what ruled it out. And so being a lawyer was essentially what was left. And then coupled with that I had a relative, specifically my uncle, who from around that time – maybe a little before, maybe a little bit after – had set out to become an attorney himself. So it was reinforced through you know someone who I – was a role model for me. And so it seemed like you know a no brainer at that point. So third grade – second grade/third grade that was around the time that I made the decision to become an attorney. And it worked out.

KM: Right. So, I mean, that's one of those things where you can make that decision when you're a little kid and by the time you get older you say, "I don't want to do this anymore." But that's not what happened for you.

CR: No. There's a saying that I often find myself falling back on really with anything in my life, that I don't change over time. Somehow I become a more concentrated version of the person I already was. So, for me, this speaks to that. You know I'm pretty headstrong in that way. That is to say when I make my mind up to do something, I'm going to do it. I'm going to follow-through. I personally have a sense of loyalty to myself. And when I promise myself I'm going to do something I try to get it done. And so I think it's really an extension of that but candidly, as I move through life, it was only reinforced by everything that I found interesting. And so whether it was civil rights issues, whether it

was police brutality issues, whether it was you know just knowing how to navigate what seemed to me like the very wrought lifestyle of adulthood, it just seemed like having a legal education would be an advantage because you weren't in a position where you needed to rely on someone else to help you resolve a matter – an unfortunate matter that you found yourself in. So whether it was being evicted, or child custody – you know these were all things that I saw played out in people's lives that surrounded me. And it always would seem like there was this sense that a lawyer was needed. One; either you know couldn't afford it or the person didn't have the means to pay for an attorney and so it always seemed like you know their situation would become exacerbated based off of that. So everything just reinforced like law's the way to go. Law's the way to go because then you don't have to deal with any of that (*chuckles*). So at least you can deal with that more formidable.

KM: Right. So you finished college and then came back to New Jersey?

CR: That's correct. So, when I –

KM: But not immediately to law school.

CR: No, not immediately to law school. When I graduated from college ideally I would have rolled right in to law school. For reasons of lack of not taking the LSAT and also kind of having – when I was in high school and in college I developed a passion for fitness, health and fitness. And so that became part of the strategy to become an attorney because it would allow me to make a living and afford me income that I could use to pay off or you know pay my way through school. And so, ideally, yes, I would have flowed directly into law school but it seemed to be a more wise move, I should say, to have a profession that I can work in that I can make money in, that I can build some work experience before heading to law school. So there was about, I guess, from 2003 until – I graduated in 2003 and then I enrolled into Rutgers Camden in 2007, so about a four-year layover.

KM: Ok. So obviously I want to talk about law school and talk about your legal career. But I'm also just sort of curious about what you, kind of, knew about Rutgers Camden as a kid growing up in Camden.

CR: I had an internship actually at a law office, and the law firm basically said "here you're going to be – you're going to do legal research". And when I would report to work they would just drop me off at the Camden Law Library. And there's a word, to this day that just – it does something to me. It makes me smile. It makes me cringe. It really embodies that sense of being an attorney that I had as a young person that I've never really been able to shed myself of just when this word is invoked – but *shepardizing*.

(Both laugh)

KM: You were shepardizing in books?

CR: I was shepardizing in books.

KM: Fantastic.

CR: Candidly, I was not shepardizing. It was basically to me just dictionaries with entries that weren't quite linear.

KM: Yeah.

CR: You know it was just like you're just looking at cases, but that said that experience was really my first blush of what Rutgers Camden was. Anytime I walked in there, I can still recall the smell of the air. I can still remember the smell of the pages of the books. And not to de-romanticize, if that's a work, or the experience it wasn't inherently appealing to me. It was a means to an end.

KM: Yeah.

CR: And I saw the value in it. And so I just put my nose down and I did it. But I couldn't tell you one thing I learned from that summer if anything.

KM: You learned how to get to the Camden Library.

CR: I learned how to get to the Camden Library. And I learned that the only way to become an attorney is to somehow arrive at a point where you know what you're doing when you're doing this.

KM: Got it.

CR: Yeah. So that was my first, my first blush with it. Thereafter, obviously, once I did my research and looked into the various schools and programs, Rutgers Camden, to me, it was a place I wanted to always go but just never had the awareness of it. But it made an abundant amount of sense. There was sentimental value. There was obviously the school was fantastic so, it had a prestige associated with it. It had a brand associated with it that I thought would translate well as someone who wanted to practice in New Jersey. So it checked off all the boxes logically. But truthfully for me, I think the main reason why I wanted to go was because I saw it as somewhat of a completion of a circle. Starting, you know, receiving my first degree here in the city of Camden and then receiving my terminal degree here in Camden, just for me was – and I'm not saying this to disparage any other school – but I could have been accepted by any other school in the nation and I still would have joined Rutgers Camden for that reason.

KM: Let's talk about law school.

CR: Ok.

KM: a little bit. What was that transition like?

CR: Uh so I was coming off of having spent you know four years in the real work, "working". I used rabbit ears. People in podcast land can't see me. And so it was a welcome return back to academia. Within this idea of becoming an attorney, I also had ambitions of becoming a professor ultimately. And so, for me, I was a kid in a candy store. That said, law school's difficult. (*chuckles*). Law school is challenging. Particularly if you don't have a blueprint on how things get done in the law school. And so, notwithstanding the fact I certainly had people who I probably could have turned to get a better sense of what that was, for reasons that - at this point I feel more embarrassed to say – but I just didn't take advantage of it. I just didn't follow through on those resources that I had. But, for that reason, I really arrived at law school completely – not overwhelmed but it was literally a "figure it out one day at a time" experience, even though I'd done my research and all that kind of stuff.

The faculty here, as a matter of fact I stopped and I met with probably the person who I would consider to be my first ally in this school when I got here, Professor Nissen. She and I made a connection very early on and that connection continues until this day. I'm very fond of her and she's been instrumental with every phase of me completing law school.

KM: And Professor Nissen, of course, is in charge of our academic support here at the law school. So you made it through. Got your degree. Got you JD and then started practicing law.

CR: So, I wish it was that simple. I did start practicing law but there was an interim in between when I started practicing law and when I graduated. Candidly, I did not pass the Bar Exam the first go-around. Or my second go-around. Or my third go-around. I passed it on my fourth try. So for me, that was not just a test of my dedication, a test of my commitment to my goal that I set when I was in second or third grade. But it also allowed me to learn and appreciate, in a way that I probably hadn't really prior to that, how much of a privilege it would be to become an attorney. And again this is not

to compare myself to anyone else but every day I wake up I have some sense of the privilege that I enjoy as someone who can represent themselves in a court of law as an attorney. And that experience for my when I was trying to pass the Bar Exam probably, I can say this now at the time I may have said something different, but probably was one of the most formative experiences of my life. Just because so close yet so far.

KM: Right.

CR: You know and I remember reading, it was an article that basically reported on the pass rates for the various schools - Rutgers, Temple, Drexel, UPenn all those things – and I remember there was a footnote, because I'm reading it maybe it was my second time not passing the Bar Exam. And I was feeling like "ok what's going on here" I mean this just feels like hazing in a way. But I remember in the article, it referenced that it doesn't chart the pass rates for people after the fourth try because the number was so statistically low. I remember thinking like – so maybe that wasn't until my fourth try – so I remember thinking like "that's a terrible omen!"

(Both laugh)

CR: "That's a terrible, terrible omen." But that said, you know ultimately I passed. And you know it's one of those things you know now I guess to the extent that this podcast is disseminated at large it's public knowledge, but it's one of the things that I'm oddly proud of. This idea that, you know, whether you are you know someone that's in law school or just graduated law school and taking the Bar Exam, that ultimately you know with a certain amount of dedication, a certain amount of belief in yourself, that even against odds that are pretty multigate you can still achieve your dream of becoming an attorney.

KM: Absolutely. Well thank you for sharing that. I mean I think you know we're in the midst of Bar Season right now. I actually did a tweet storm this morning for folks who are taking the Bar Exam, but I mean you put all this effort into graduating and getting your JD and there's this last barrier that you have to jump over. And everybody doesn't do it on the first time. But whether you pass the first time or the fourth time, you're still a lawyer. And so having that sort of sense of "Stick to it", and one of the other things that you talked about that I want to just reinforce because I think it's so important, um, is tapping your resources.

CR: Yep.

KM: Right? I mean, one of the things I think is really great about what we do here is try to figure out how to give people the resources that they need whether they're first gen coming to law school or somebody who's fifth gen coming to law school.

You talked about Professor Nissen, but what are some of the ways in which she was a resource to you, a support person for you as you went through law school?

CR: So I should say I only specifically named Professor Nissen because I saw her immediately before walking in today, but there were many resources I had. So Professor Nissen. Dean Baker. Camille Andrews. Dean Beckerman. Professor Bosniak. Professor Harvey. Professor Cohen. I'm not just naming people that I can class with. I'm naming people who, at certain points – very memorable points in my time here, I was able to have a discussion or two or a dozen with, and really help get me, you know, from the beginning of the semester to mid-semester, and mid-semester to the end of the semester. And the first thing that I would say that were the common bond – the common thread that unites all of those people that I just met - or just named - was the fact that they were all accessible and welcoming. I felt them to be extremely support-based; the professors and their approach to teaching and administrating this law school. So specifically Professor Nissen, I can say this about her, that it was her personality – the warmth of her personality. The care that just went into her interest in me as a student and her questions that basically allowed me to share my story with her, and her

remembering it and us being able to use it as a foundation for anything that I came along while I was here. I found that to be the case with most of the individuals that I just named, and for me that's huge. It's the human element. It's the part of it that makes the students feel like even though they're administrators or teachers or professors, they can relate to what you're going through because one: they maybe have been there before or two: they're just an expert in recognizing what the needs of an incoming 1L student is and are able to convert that into a foundation for a much more enduring relationship thereafter. And I had that with all those individuals, so...

KM: Talk to me a little about what the Rutgers Law Degree has allowed you to do.

CR: It has, in no uncertain terms, it is probably the most liberating force that I've acquired in my life because it really allowed and allows me to, in a public setting, to communicate without having to do anything demonstrative that I'm someone who is competent. That I'm someone who can get things done. And that I can be charged with certain responsibilities, and again we're talking now in a legal context, where there are literal things at stake and in terms of being trusted to make sure that those things protected. That's a very generic way of saying that, that's a very circuitous way of saying that it's allowed me to become the person I always aspired to be without necessarily having to tell anyone that that's who I want to be. It's just assumed that if you're a Rutgers Law School Graduate that you have certain abilities. And it's not versus another school or anything like that. It's really just an entity and an endowment unto itself. It's just – you know – you're good. What can you do for us? What can we do for you?

KM: Right.

CR: So it's an extremely liberating force in that sense because it allows you to not have to qualify yourself. You're kind of – you're good until you mess up (*Chuckles*). You know, you're given a credence of someone who deserves to be – who deserves a seat at the table.

KM: Right. Right. Excellent. So one of the other pieces that I want to talk to you about is your experiences as a Black man. In particular, because you see fewer Black men graduating from college, fewer Black men going to law school, or graduating from law school, or being out in the world as practicing attorneys. So could you talk a little bit about whether you feel like that creates particular responsibilities for you out there in the world that you have to carry around? And if so, what those are and how they play themselves out.

CR: I think that's a very deep question because my instinctive answer is absolutely. There are facets to being a Black man, irrespective of being an attorney, that gives you a unique perspective and a unique trajectory in our society. I would say that being a Black man with a college degree, being a Black man with a law degree, being a Black man with a license to practice law further distinguishes that experience. And so to answer, I guess, the initial thrust of your question 'Do I feel any additional responsibilities?' I do but they're not burdensome at all. They're completely – you embrace it. I'm not comparing myself to anyone else to my experience to anyone else's experience but I wouldn't trade it for the world. It is absolutely life in its most sentient sense. I mean you have all of these exposures and all of these experiences and you get to take in all this information and all of these things and interact and engage in society in a way that, without those attributes attending you, you may not have the engagement. So to put it into practice, it happens more often than anyone that I'm collegial with would care to admit but, you know, you walk into a courtroom and you know there's reserved seating typically for attorneys, this can be superior court, small court what have you, and there is an unfortunate perception – at least initially when you walk in – are you counsel or are you a defendant? And I, more times than I can count, have been assumed to be a defendant. And in no way, shape, or form have I ever been you know, you hear people say it's insulting or anything like that, it's not. It's a symptom of some of the ills in our society and some of the stereotypes that help keep these things going. But yeah so you have that experience right? And that's a very simple, you know, sort of put a ribbon on it and pack it away. But you know other ones that are the obverse. You know, where someone sees you and I've been in courtrooms where there was a disproportionate amount of African

American/Black Americans present and they see you and they recognize you as counsel and the amount of pride and the amount of esteem and the amount of head nods and winked eyes that you get – and I say ‘winked eyes’ not in a flirtatious sense.

KM: Right. Right.

(Both laugh)

KM: I got it.

CR: Winked eyes like “I see you”.

KM: Right. That acknowledgement. Absolutely.

CR: Right. And so, I mean, that is – I mean – it’s beautiful. It’s beautiful. It’s something that I wish were not the case but if it’s going to be the case I want to experience it. So, yeah, I think that being African American, or being a Black American Male definitely makes the – makes my status as an attorney more interesting. I’m sorry I didn’t get to all of the points of your question – yeah it definitely plays a role. To me, I’m going to go one step further, it’s inseparable in very sometimes obvious and sometimes not so obvious ways. So I read the law through the lens of someone with a certain amount of life experience that didn’t always align with what the law purports to be. So sometimes your interactions with law enforcement, sometimes your interactions with society at large, you know, often times I find that I have the sense of things of someone who isn’t endowed with the ability to practice law.

KM: Mmm hmm. *(agreeing)*

CR: Because that’s just, you know, I spent the first thirty years of my life not being able to practice law. You can’t separate out what, you know, the aggregate effect of those sensibilities are. That said once you pass the Bar Exam, and now you are capable of practicing law, it puts a total different spin on it. And now that same – those same sensibilities you carry, now function to make you more sympathetic in your capacity as an attorney. And it functions to make you more understanding. And it’s been my experience that it makes me a better advocate when the interests involved are those that align with the interests of the people that I’m most agree with. Again these are more circuitous ways of saying that me being an attorney and me being a Black male are inseparable and I think it makes me a better attorney – it makes me a better attorney than I would be if I did not have that dual experience.

KM: That’s great. So there are a couple things there that are just so important. And that, I think, are really fundamental at least to the way that I think about teaching law and teaching folks to think about their law careers. One is – their legal career – one is that we should always bring a critical eye to the law. Right? That we can’t just assume that it’s all objective. That so much of law is deeply subjective. And second that you should bring your whole self to the practice of law. You know, one of the things that I say to students is you know you go to work every day but you have to go home at night and live with what you’ve done at your office. So really sort of being conscious of who is the person that I want to be in the world? What is the work that I want to put out into the world? How do I want to use my law degree in a way where I go home at night, I put my head down on the pillow, I can feel good about the choices that I made that day?

CR: Absolutely.

KM: So talk – I know that you’re not, you’ve moved out of practicing law per se, so we’ll get into that a little bit at the end. But what kind of law were you practicing?

CR: Ok. So before I answer this questions, and at the risk of correcting the person who I have no

business correcting right now, I technically – I still do practice law. And I will continue to practice law.

KM: Ok.

CR: I don't want to get myself fired for doing this.

(Both laugh)

CR: ...My employer finds out the hard way like, "I don't trust them to be here anymore." Um. No. I still practice law and I will continue to practice law but my roles have more or less so changed. I currently practice law full-time and I teach part-time. And that's how – that's what I've been doing for the last seven or eight years. That will flip and I will go into teaching full-time and practicing on a part-time basis. So within my capacity as an attorney, I work for a law firm in Flemington, NJ by the name of Kuchinsky / Rotunno. And it's a pretty lean, two-man outfit at this point. It's Tony and myself. The founding partner, Mr. Kuchinsky, has retired. And so for the most part it's just Tony and I and it's a general practice. And I say "general practice", I think that's not a term that you hear many people use anymore because so many attorneys, I believe, opt to specialize because it is - you know – it's a lot. There are a lot of types of law that you can practice. And so being in general practice, you know I think has its own set of drawbacks. But within that, with that said, I do, obviously, criminal defense. We do municipal courts; you know traffic court. We also do family law. We also do worker's compensation. We also do real estate closings, last wills for people...

KM: That's plenty.

CR: And family law.

KM: Right.

CR: So and what's funny is you know because we do it all, it just – in my sense it just blurs into what it means to be an attorney. It's only when I have a conversation with someone who specializes do I realize like "ooh. Oh wow! People actually have no idea what worker's compensation court is all about." And so, my first job as an attorney was working for the law firm that I currently work for. And Tony, Mr. Kuchinsky, are constant professionals who are very good at each of those areas of law. And so what's also amazing, or what's also been part of this experience for me as an attorney, is that I've had as my two co-bosses, two people who are experts in about seven or eight different areas of law. And, with that experience, it made me realize that that's the type of attorney that I wanted to be even though initially, I think part of my motivation to become an attorney was, you know, I wanted to do civil rights and constitutional law, and those things are still near and dear to my heart. It's just that for all practical purposes I ended up being presented with an opportunity to be a general practitioner and now I wouldn't trade it for the world. I once remarked to someone who was trying to condescend to me based off of the fact that I was a general practitioner – "Oh it means that you know..." He said something to the effect of "Jack of all trades. Master of none." And he said it in a sense to kind of like, it was like a dig. It was another attorney. And then my response, without even really thinking about it, but just knowing that I would not stand for him thinking he one-upped me with that statement because I think he missed the big picture. My response was, "Relevant in all things. Irrelevant in none." And for me that really embodies the best part about being a general practitioner, which is virtually anyone who has a bad day or who has an interaction with the court or with the law can reach out to me and I can – or my firm – and we can provide guidance. We can provide counsel and representation in the event that they choose to go with us. So I thoroughly, thoroughly enjoy that facet of what I do as a practicing attorney. And for that reason, even though I'm going to transition to academia in the Fall full-time, I would not part with that because it's very empowering. Very, very empowering.

KM: So tell us quickly where and what you're teaching.

CR: So I will be teaching at Rider University which is in Lawrenceville, NJ. And in the Fall I will be assuming the position of Lecturer in their College of Business Administration. And I'll be teaching Business Ethics courses and Legal Ethics courses to business students. So um, start off with me teaching Legal Ethics at both the undergraduate and the graduate level.

KM: Terrific! Congratulations!

CR: Thank you very much. It's a dream come true.

KM: Alright. So I'm going to ask you two more questions and then I'm going to let you stop talking. So the first question is, and again we're at Bar Season. Who knows when it will be when people listen to this. But we can play it back every Bar Season. What advice do you have for folks who are preparing to take the Bar right now?

CR: I think advice is a strong word. I'll prompt this as I'll share with the listeners what a part of my experience has been and you can take it or leave it. But the angst that I carried with me the first time I took the Bar Exam – I wish I had a sense of the moment to be able to sort of be more calm about it and have a little bit more confidence in myself. Because, you know, I feel like it's a performance-based exam. And so there's a stamina component. There is a recall component, how much can you recall? And then there is sort of, you know, can you crack the – can you identify what the question is actually asking and not be distracted by you know all the other things that may attend you discerning what the correct answer is both for the multiple choice and the writing. And so, I think nerves and angst, notwithstanding the fact that I think they demonstrate that the individual cares, I think that sometimes they can override our sense of everything we've done to get there. And if you can just take stock of "You would not be here if you hadn't earned the opportunity. And there is no sense that you're going to do poorly operating in anyone else's mind except for yours." The only people that really doubt, or the greatest doubt is usually felt in the individuals experiencing it. And so, for me, if I can just go back in time and carry that sense, I think that my trajectory would have been slightly less dilatory, I have to say. And then, by transitive property, when I did take the exam and I was able to pass, candidly, I was headed to the beach after the exam. I worked out in the morning of the exam.

(KM chuckles)

CR: I could not have been more laid back or more *(sighs)* It was confidence but not in a way that I can ever recapture. It was just – it was my time. And I knew it going into it. And so, um, all of that is attitudinal. All of that is psychological. Almost psyching yourself out, if you will. And that's the 'quote' rabbit ears advice that I would give like realize part of your performance just depends on what – how you perceive yourself and how you perceive the opportunity. If it's intimidating to you, there will be reminders of that during the exam. If it's not intimidating to you, and what I mean by not intimidating, if it's something that you embrace and you accept as just part of the process then you'll meet each one of those moments where you're being challenged in like form. You're just being challenged. No one is trying to sink your ship so to speak. So, it's attitudinal which that's the best advice I think I can offer. How you put yourself in that mindset is completely up to you. I know that for me, again when I was able to pass the Bar Exam, there were so many things that I had going on in my life that were – that I was handling well. And so, the Bar Exam became an extension of those things. Versus other times when I was preparing for the Bar Exam, I just let everything else just kind of fall by the wayside. And, candidly, those things were distractions. They took away from my thought energy. They took away from my time and my actual energy. Addressing these things that I saw sort of going up in many flames around me as I dedicated myself, you know, going all in with the Bar Exam. So, again, that was my experience. I don't know if it's going to apply to every person's situation but I am – I feel blessed at this point to have been able to crack that piece of my own mystery, my own puzzle, which allowed me to ultimately to pass the Exam. I should also say, and again this is purely by way of being transparent to the extent to there's anyone wondering if I took a Barbri course or PMBR course or anything like that. I did not. So, I did not take any of the Bar Prep courses. I, you know, for reasons um you know going purely into my situation at the time, I had to

opt not to do those things. So that also colored my trajectory. So without the benefit of those things, or with the benefit of those things perhaps I should say, it would have been different. Ultimately, I did it without having to rely on those resources.

KM: Right. Right. Alright. Last question. If you knew someone who was getting ready to start their first year of law school, what's the one thing you would tell them to make sure to do as a first year student to be successful?

CR: I think this goes back to what I referenced indirectly earlier, which was tapping into the resources that are available at the school. It may sound cliché. It may even sound completely unoriginal but I believe it is so ripe for exploitation, and I use that in a positive sense. You have no idea the amount of resources your resources have. *(Laughs)* Which is something that people often times don't think about. They think of resources as ending at the resource, but your resources have resources. And part of what makes that individual a resource is that they are willing to leverage those resources in your favor. And so tapping into your resources. And that means going to speak with your professors during their office hours. That means striking up conversations with them if you ever end up in an elevator with them and just not, you know, going on the elevator in silence. I can't tell you how many of my professors either before I take their class or during the time I'm taking their class that I know they ran out of the elevator like wanting to get away from me because I was trying to make up and force conversation.

(Both laugh)

CR: But the idea is those moments basically create a little – um - they create traction between you and that individual so that there's more grip there when you go to reach out to that person as a resource. You have something that you can trace a prior interaction back to. I remember being in an elevator one time and feeling so, there were a bunch of people in the elevator. I believe I was the only student at the time. And I won't say the full cast of characters there but it was a who's who of Rutgers Camden. And I remember just feeling like "I need to say something."

(Both laugh)

CR: I need to say something profound. I need to say something that's going to make me...

KM: That's a lot of pressure.

CR: It was. It was a high amount of pressure in there for me because I felt like it was a moment. Now, in reality, the people who were in elevator probably don't even remember. But I remember they were talking amongst themselves. And I just saw fit to slide in my own little statement. And, I'll never forget it, it actually really became my philosophy about law moving forward and even to this day it's you know. If I ever became – if I ever arrived at a point of notoriety for my contributions in the law or academia, I would want it to trace back to this statement. But I said, "To study law, is to study the moral evolution of man." And I remember I just said that out of a sense of pressure but I needed to say something to fit in with this conversation. And I just remember everyone just kind of looked at me.

(Both laugh)

CR: As if like "where the heck did that come from?" And at the time, it was just the only thing that came out of the hat when I reached in. But, for all of what I know now is just a moment of academic panic, a nugget of truth sprang from me that I fully endorse because it fully colors the way I practice law and how I conceive of law. To study law, is to study the moral evolution of man. Our laws literally tell you what our collective conscious is at every segment along our journey in this country. And so when that elevator ride concluded and I had to fixate on "what the heck did I just say and why did I just embarrass myself?" What I ended up feeling was "No. This is why you came to law

school. This is what you are here to learn and to figure out.” It just so happens you figured it out in an elevator trying to impress some people. But that, for me, is my guiding light. And so when I look at the law as a practice or academia, I don’t look at it as an end all be all. That is to say, what’s written down is just part of this larger trajectory for our society to get us to where we’re ultimately trying to get, which is a more perfect union and a better version of ourselves. And when you’re reading the law, you’re just looking at the proofs of how far we’ve come and the evidence of how far we have to go. And so yeah, that’s how I look at it.

KM: There’s a nice place to end!

(Both laugh)

KM: Thank you so much for taking the time to talk with us today Charles.

CR: This was an absolute pleasure.

KM: It’s been great to have you back in the building.

CR: It’s an honor. I’m very humbled and I can’t thank you enough for the opportunity. Thank you.

KM: Absolutely.

Transcription written by Kate Bianco, Advancement Coordinator, Rutgers Law School