

*Catalyst Profile*  
**Christopher Geis**

Ironically, an in-the-flesh rendition of Harper Lee’s Atticus Finch motivated Christopher Geis, who graduated in 1988, to try his hand at passing the bar. Now, as the former WCU history major continues to cultivate his 18-year law career in Winston-Salem, he cannot help but look to his advisor, Max Williams, whose values had a great impact on him.

“Max’s demeanor reminds me of Finch from "To Kill a Mockingbird," said Geis, referring to the 1960s Pulitzer Prize-winning novel. “He was true to certain basic moral principles on how people should be treated.”

His professional pursuits go back to the halls of McKee. There, under the watch of “Finch,” Jim Lewis, and William Anderson, a self-described “know-it-all” freshman began delving into American history. Geis learned how to write meticulously, construct a valid argument, and analyze text.

For a short stint after graduating from Western, he served as a newspaper reporter and editor for the Winston-Salem Journal and High Point Enterprise. His passion for public issues, however, led him to the Wake Forest School of Law, and in 1998, he was permitted to practice in all state courts in North Carolina.

Though Carolina was home, duty called Geis in the Middle East three years after joining the Navy. For the last five years, Geis has served as a commander in the United States Navy Reserve Judge Advocate General’s Corps. His dedication to Operation Enduring Freedom and Operations Iraqi Freedom has taken the WCU alumnus to the Persian Gulf, North Arabian Sea, and Kuwait.

A three-year stay at Camp LeJeune, a Marine Corps base in Jacksonville, North Carolina, even inspired “A Carolina Blue Bikini and a Court-Martial,” a short story published in the winter 2014 edition of The North Carolina State Bar Journal. The piece, an eclectic interplay of love, law, and loss, describes a young man who would “trade a Carolina blue football jersey for marine dress blues and some sand-colored desert fatigues.”

The North Carolina resident continues to write op-eds for the Winston-Salem Journal while also practicing civil litigation defense at Womble Carlyle Sandridge & Rice down in Forsyth County.

Though he has been forced to address anything from a sheriff’s supposed negligence to a Family and Medical Leave Act claim, Geis contends that his career in law would be impossible without the self-confidence and intellect he found in Cullowhee.

“WCU gave me a tremendous foundation: a foundation for being a good citizen, a good officer, and a member of the bar,” said Geis.