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A 'Life-Changing' Gift: David F. Smith '78 Funds Student's Full-Tuition Scholarship

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Leadership Giving

A 'life-changing' gift

David F. Smith '78 funds one student's full-tuition scholarship

David F. Smith '78 knows what it feels like to work your way through law school. The coursework is tough enough; add in a job and a family, and three years can feel like an eternity at hard labor. Smith and his wife, Lucy, were married and had a son by the time he started studying at UB Law School. He attended part time for a while, holding down a job as well, before the Law School began requiring all students to be full time. As a full-time student, he worked as a law clerk at National Fuel Gas Supply Corp.

Now David and Lucy Smith have made a major gift that will carry one student through her Law School years on a full-tuition scholarship. He says he intends to repeat the gift once the current scholarship recipient, Tonya R. Lewis, graduates.

"Without UB Law School," he said, "I would have never had an opportunity to become a lawyer, to be in the situation I am in. My success is really as a result of the Law School and the opportunities provided by the Law School.

"For so many people in my class, without the opportunity that was provided by UB Law, who knows what we would be doing? At this point there are a number of prospective law students that I think those of us who are able to help should help, if and when we can."

From that early job as a law clerk, Smith stayed on at National Fuel, becoming general counsel for the natural gas supplier. His legal training, he said, was most useful. "Especially in a regulated environment, in utilities which are very heavily regulated, a legal background is critical," he said. "I think lawyers tend to have a certain thought process that they go through that is very helpful in business."

Now, as National Fuel's president and



Tonya Lewis '10 is the first recipient of the Phyllis G. Smith Scholarship.

chief operating officer, Smith sees the value of paving the way for the next generation of legal practitioners. His gift establishes the Phyllis G. Smith Scholarship, named in memory of his late mother. "She was the one who always said that you can be whatever you want to be," he says. "She really provided me and my brothers with our work ethic and the mindset to get out and succeed."

A side benefit of the scholarship is that it can become part of the process of recruiting talented students who otherwise might not be able to afford a UB Law education. One criterion for awarding the scholarship is financial need.

But for first-year student Tonya Lewis, the first recipient of the Smith Scholarship, the news

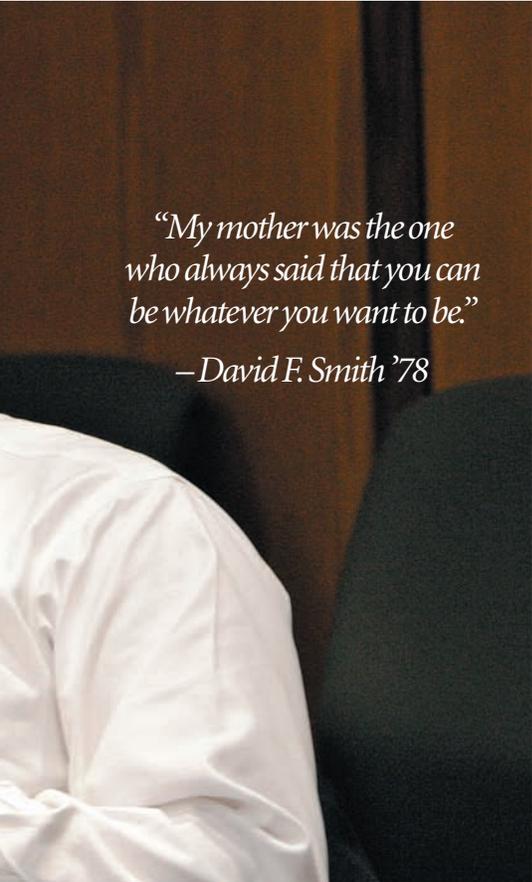
came after she already had arrived in Buffalo.

A 2006 graduate of the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater, Lewis is married and has two daughters, ages 8 and 4. She studied physical geography and environmental studies as an undergraduate, doing field work in the rain forests of Belize, and was attracted to UB Law largely for its clinical program in environmental law. "UB just seemed to be the right fit for me," she said. "I really like it."



She and her husband had sold their home in Wisconsin, moved to Western New York and bought a house here. Then Lillie V. Wiley-Upshaw, associate dean for admissions and financial aid, called with good news: Lewis had been named the first Smith Scholar, and her three years at the Law School would be tuition-free.

"It is really a life-changing event," Lewis said. "Prior to receiving the scholarship, I may have had to take a position that is high-paying in order to pay back my student loans from Law School. Now I have the freedom to take an environmental po-



“My mother was the one who always said that you can be whatever you want to be.”

—David F. Smith '78

sition that may not be so high-paying.”

Beyond that, she said, to be free of loan debt means her family will be better able to save for their children’s college education.

David and Lucy Smith had a voice in the selection process, and he said he hopes his fellow alumni will consider similar gifts. “It is important for the Law School,” said Smith, who is a member of the Dean’s Advisory Council. “I would encourage them to look at what the Law School has done for themselves and how they could help repay that.”

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