



AMTA Spotlight: Distinguished Alumna, Shana Knizknik

AMTA was founded more than 30 years ago, and, in that time, tens of thousands of people have competed in undergraduate mock trial. Many of us know AMTA alums with interesting backgrounds or who have gone on to do great things. But, too often, we only know about people with whom we competed or coached. With *AMTA Spotlight*, we seek to change that by profiling former AMTA participants whose backgrounds, experiences, or current life would be of interest to our broad readership.

Our second alumni profile is of Shana Knizknik. A 2010 graduate of Columbia University and a 2015 graduate of NYU Law School, Knizknik is most famous outside the AMTA community as the creator and curator of the [Notorious R.B.G Tumblr](#) and the co-author of the book [Notorious RBG: The Life and Times of Ruth Bader Ginsburg](#), which the *New York Times* review described as “a cheery curio,” “entertaining,” and “a playful project ... [that] asks to be read seriously.” She spoke with *AMTAConnect* from Philadelphia, where she is currently clerking for Judge Dolores Sloviter of the United States Court of Appeals for the Third Circuit.

1. Where are you from?

Philadelphia, PA.

2. How did you first start doing mock trial?

I first joined my high school mock trial team as a sophomore and was immediately hooked. I had done theater since elementary school, had thought about law as a possible career for a while, and always enjoyed arguing, so the activity was obviously a perfect fit. My high school team won the City Championships my sophomore and senior years and we were state runners-up my senior year. However, when I made the team at Columbia, my obsession reached an entirely new level.

3. What were the highlights of your AMTA career?

I never made it to the final round at Nationals, but we got 4th place in our division my senior year and 5th place my freshman year, both of which were thrilling. My senior year, NYU ended up winning Nationals. We had hit them 3rd Round at ORCS and split +1, -1. That was probably the best round of mock trial in my career.

However, while in law school I was able to work with my undergraduate team as an assistant coach under Mia Eisner-Grynberg, who was my coach in undergrad and has remained a friend and mentor. Working with students has probably been the most rewarding experience in my mock trial career.

4. What's the biggest / most important thing you learned from your time doing mock trial?

I think the biggest thing I learned was the value of portraying confidence in everything you do, even if you are secretly doubting yourself. Fake it 'till you make it!

5. What was your favorite AMTA case?

Absolutely the Max Jeffries case, which was written by my Columbia teammate, Lauren Zimmerman. It was a § 1983 claim of excessive force against the Polk County Police Department. It was a fascinating fact pattern that related to my real-world interests. And it didn't hurt having the case author as co-counsel.

6. How did the whole Notorious RBG thing start?

I started the Notorious RBG blog in the summer between my first and second years of law school, primarily in response to a number of disappointing decisions that had come out, to which Justice Ginsburg wrote dissenting opinions, including *Shelby County v. Holder*. That case struck down the main provision of the Voting Rights Act, one of the most important pieces of civil rights legislation in our history. I was inspired by RBG's searing dissent, and decided that there needed to be a space on the internet to celebrate this amazing person in our history. The more I learned about her, the more obsessed I became. Let's just say it took off, and the rest is history.

7. What is your favorite RBG story?

I think the favorite anecdote I learned while reporting the book was from a professor who had worked with RBG at the ACLU. He told me a story of going white water rafting with then-DC Circuit Judge Ginsburg. The rafting instructors were worried that she was too light to sit in the front of the raft, and that she could possibly fly out if they hit too hard of a bump. RBG's response? "I don't sit in the back."

8. What's next for you?

I'm currently clerking on the United States Court of Appeals for the Third Circuit in my hometown of Philadelphia. However, I hope to return to New York City this fall to begin my career as a public defender.