

# The Big Test

## By ReadWorks

Liana nervously bit her nails while she waited for the exam to arrive. She shifted uncomfortably in her chair, wondering why the seat had to be so hard if she was going to be sitting in it all day. She looked around the room; hundreds of other law students sat in rows staring anxiously at the tables in front of them. Just as she began to take a deep breath to calm her anxiety, a proctor placed an exam booklet in front of her. This was the moment she had been anticipating ever since she began law school three years ago. She picked up her pencil, and opened to the first page of the bar exam, a necessary test for all students wanting to become licensed lawyers.

Liana never thought she would want to become a lawyer. Her parents were both artists—her father, a music teacher, and her mother, a curator for a famous art gallery in New York City—so law was something she had not been exposed to as a child. But art made for a tumultuous career—both of her parents had struggled when they were younger to find jobs in the area of their passion. Even though they had both emerged successful and happy, Liana wanted something different. During university, she was attracted to the powerful world of politics as well as to the complex study of medicine. She liked how everything in science was clear-cut—facts were facts, and also there was the opportunity to care for people, to help save lives. Yet what she missed in this field was room for debate; she loved to argue and try to sway her opponent’s opinion. She was the anchor on her high school debate team, and consistently impressed her competitors with her analytical thinking. “Never argue with Ms. Lakes,” her teachers would say. So she chose to major in politics, knowing that she could never stray far from a good dispute. Plus, not spending eight years in medical school sounded pretty good to her.

But the path she chose also led to a decent amount of schooling—once she graduated with a bachelor’s degree, she applied to numerous law schools and finally accepted a place at a prestigious university in the city where her mom worked. She easily convinced herself that it was all worth it; in her mind, she pictured herself in a New York City courtroom dressed in an expensive suit, with papers in her hand, waving at the jury in an impassioned speech on human rights. She knew if she just continued to work hard and study late into the night, she could get there.

But now, with the bar exam sitting in front of her, she started to worry. “What if I don’t pass? Will this all be worth it? Did I study enough?” Her thoughts raced through her mind. On

the first page of the exam booklet were seven paragraphs detailing a situation involving the will and testament of a hypothetical character who had recently passed away. The story gave many details about the writing of the will, about who had been appointed its executor—the person who carries out the terms of the will—and who had been given what by the testator, or writer of the will. The paragraphs were followed by a series of questions that Liana and her fellow test-takers all had to answer in a well-organized essay. The first question asked if the will was admitted to probate. “The question is asking if the will has been proven official and acceptable...” Liana thought as she scanned through the essay once more to pick up any important details. She arrived at the answer of yes, and she quickly scribbled down an explanation before moving onto the next question. The next few hours went like this, and Liana struggled to stay focused as the clock ticked closer and closer to the lunch hour.

At 12:00 p.m. sharp, a buzzer sounded and everyone was told to put down their pencils and proceed out the doors for an hour-long lunch break. Liana searched for her friend from law school, Kevin, with whom she had developed a close relationship after spending so many days and nights in the library studying together. She finally spotted him in a throng of exhausted students, wandering toward the cafeteria in a daze.

“Kevin!” she yelled out. He spun around and smiled at her. “How’d it go?” she asked.

“To be honest, I have no idea, I just kept writing,” he said.

Liana laughed and said she felt the same way. They joined the congregation that had lined up for food, and found a couple of seats in the massive crowd.

“Hey, how’s it going? I’m Tara, and this is Brandon,” said the girl sitting next to Liana once they had taken their seats, pointing to her friend across the table.

“Good, thanks; I’m Liana, and this is Kevin,” she replied.

The four chatted briefly about the exam and about where they went to law school, finding that they had several friends in common.

“It’s a small world, isn’t it,” Tara said with a smile.

Once they all had finished lunch, they took a stroll outside to warm up from the chilly air conditioning inside.

“So what made you do all this?” Liana asked Tara, wondering about why she had chosen to become a lawyer.

“Good question,” she said, staring at the ground, then continued after a short pause. “My parents got divorced when I was young, and my mom’s lawyer was awful at her job, so I ended

up being shuttled back and forth between my two parents in the most inconvenient way. I figured I could become a lawyer and make some kid's life a lot easier," she explained.

Liana nodded her head and smiled. They both walked in silence for a bit, with Brandon and Kevin following close behind. Brandon checked his watch, noticing that it was almost 1:00 p.m.

"Hey guys, we have to go back in," he said.

The four groaned, then exchanged words of encouragement. They strolled back into the exam center a bit more refreshed.

As Liana sat down in her uncomfortable chair once again, she thought of Tara's comments. She wondered about how many of the surrounding test-takers were in it for reasons like Tara's, and how many of them wanted to become lawyers for the money and prestige. She opened her booklet once again. "It doesn't matter," she thought. She knew that she wanted to do good. Liana finished the second half of the exam that day with a bit more confidence than what she started with in the morning.