

BEYOND *the* LAW

TARA RICH

Interview by Daniel J. Murphy
Photos by Joe S. Murphy

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Hoping to get in an early morning run, Tara Rich launches her kayak near the East End Beach on Casco Bay and starts paddling toward Fort Gorges. It is a perfect summer day in Maine, with clear blue skies and intense rays of sunlight bouncing off of the ocean's waves. Navigating the wake left by passing boats, Rich charts her course and enjoys a view of the City of Portland that is undeniably stunning. For Rich, kayaking is not only a great way of untying the knots of the mind, but it is also an opportunity to get closer to nature. In recent years, Rich has been able to share her love of the ocean with others by serving as a certified Maine sea kayaking guide. When she is not enjoying time on the water, Rich practiced law at Libby, O'Brien, Kingsley, and Champion in Kennebunk, but recently decided to return to her home state to serve as Legal and Policy Director for the ACLU of Alaska. Rich recently sat down with the *Maine Bar Journal* to discuss her interest.

Tell me about your interest in kayaking.

I grew up in Alaska actually, not on the ocean, but I did do some kayaking up there. We used to live on Kenai Peninsula and it was pretty incredible. We lived in Cooper Landing, which has a population of about 300 people, about three hours south of Anchorage. And then when I went to high school, I moved to the Soldotna area, which is a little bit bigger.

Did you kayak with your family in Alaska?

I did. My family did a little bit of kayaking. I did a lot more with a friend of mine in the Soldotna area. The Kenai Peninsula is just north of Kodiak Island, so we would drive down to the end of the Peninsula in Homer. We did a couple of camping trips and overnight kayaking adventures near Seldovia. They were a lot of fun.

How did you become a Maine certified guide for kayaking?

I went to college in D.C. and then law school in New Orleans. After law school, I came back to Maine. It has such an incredible coastline that I really wanted to take advantage of it while I was here. So shortly after I started a clerkship and was living here in Maine, I took a guide certification course.

What does the certification course entail?

You can take a two-week or three-week course where you learn about everything from navigation to safety on the water to rolling and rescues. It also includes the elements of planning a good trip, such as navigation, the supplies you need, how to take into account weather patterns, and things like that. Most people work with a sea kayaking business after they get certified, I work with Coastal Maine Kayak in Kennebunk. The examination process is delightful. You go to the Inland Fisheries and Wildlife Office in Augusta. They do all of the testing—not just for sea kayaking guides, but also hunting guides and recreational guides.



They are two old Mainers who just know everything about the back woods. They do know a lot about sea kayaking too, but you can tell that this is kind of just a portion of their job. They are very colorful.

You mentioned rolling. Can you tell our readers what rolling is?

On sea kayaks, you have a skirt around you. This is not the case for lake kayaks or white water kayaks. For many sea kayakers, it becomes important to right your kayak or flip. If you get turned upside down without exiting the kayak, you can use your paddle in such a way that you can right yourself. It's just one broad sweeping stroke that will allow you to turn back upright without having to exit your boat.

What equipment do you typically use when you go out on the sea?

It depends on the type of trip, but a good guide's supplies typically would include your spray skirt, which keeps water out of your cockpit. The type of kayak that you have is very important. A lot of people go out on the oceans without being prepared for the elements. You definitely want a sea kayak that is designed for use in the ocean as opposed to a sit on top kayak or a lake kayak that would just be open. Some people even use a canoe, which can be really, really dangerous in the open ocean here in Maine. You also would need a PFD or a life jacket. You would want to carry a whistle with you. This is required by the Coast Guard. Usually, you have a knife with you. Depending on the season, you always dress for the water temperature, so you would usually have a wetsuit with a paddling jacket in the summer, or you can have a dry suit if you're going in the winter. You'll also want dry bags and water

bottles, and you always have a spare paddle. If you are a guide, you have a tow system just in case you need to get anybody out of a sticky situation, which I had to do recently. You hook on to another kayak, and you can tow them. Usually, you carry a paddle float. It's just a balloon basically that attaches to the end of your paddle that you can use to either self-rescue to just get back in your boat if you end up outside of it. You also would want charts to know where you are.

How did you become interested in giving kayaking tours and lessons?

I consider it my moonlight job. It is a kind of therapy in a lot of ways! It is so intensely enjoyable just to be out there with people who are relaxed. They are there to have a good time and are interested in activity. I have had a fantastic time with it. I get to see people in a completely different element compared to my normal day-to-day work in litigation or family law cases. After I was certified, I basically wanted to be able to pay for my hobby. But after I started, it really became something that I just enjoyed doing for the sake of being out there, especially meeting people from all over the country.

How often do you do the tours?

Usually, throughout the summer, we start on June 15 and we go through about October 15, and I am usually out there every Saturday and Sunday.

And how long do the tours typically last?

Four hours are our typical tours. They always occur at high tide because we go out of Cape Porpoise, and it's all intertidal zone. You don't want to have to schlep through the mud.

Beyond The Law features conversations with Maine lawyers who pursue unique interests or pastimes. Readers are invited to suggest candidates for Beyond The Law by contacting Dan Murphy at dmurphy@bernsteinshur.com.

Any interesting experiences while giving a tour?

I've certainly had some very interesting experiences. Last year, I had this man who was on my tour with his wife. They both wanted their own boats. I normally try to put somebody who I think maybe needs a little more stability in a tandem boat so that they paddle together. It tends to be a little bit more stable. The single boats can be tippy. We got out to the water, and the man tipped over five times before we started paddling. I went through my process as a guide. You're trying to get everyone into their boats and fitted. You are adjusting their foot pegs in the bottom of the boats, making sure everyone is comfortable in their boats. And as I'm doing that and am just watching this man tip over and over. I would help him and go back, and then he would tip over and over. This happened again and it became clear that he might need a little bit more assistance, but he really wanted to do the trip on his own. Normally, I might hesitate in a situation like this, but I agreed that we could go out as long as we stayed in areas that would not be dangerous or compromising. I ended up towing him, but he got to go on the trip out on the water. When we got back to the shop after the tour was over, his wife pulled me aside and said that he was recently diagnosed with terminal cancer and that this was their trip together. They were fulfilling their dream vacation and a big part of that was kayaking the coast of Maine. It just totally mowed me over, and I felt really honored to share the experience with them.

Any intersection between your legal world and your kayaking world?

I have had a number of people on my tours who are also lawyers, so we do end up talking shop. I had a couple of women who are family law lawyers on a tour that I had earlier this year. I actually

ended up calling one of them because I had a question about New York family law. That was very helpful. Other than that, I'm happy to report no. I haven't had too many of my legal clients show up in my other world.

What are some of the things you love about kayaking?

It's always fun to see wildlife. I've been kayaking a number of times up in the Stonington area, on Deer Isle. If you head up there around June, you get to see the seals with their pups on the rocks. It's one of the most peaceful experiences to sit there from a safe distance and just watch the mother and the pups jumping on and off the rocks.

What's the best advice you've ever received?

The best advice I think I've received is probably from Cheryl Strayed, an author who also has an advice column. In a book called *Tiny Beautiful Things*, she reminded me to not lament about how your career is going to turn out. You don't have a career; you have a life. It is important to just do the work, keep the faith, and have the courage to keep going. I heard another quote from someone else recently that said courage is not always loud, boastful, or roaring. Sometimes the strongest courage is this tiny little voice at the end of the day that says, "I'll try again tomorrow." I thought that was pretty great.



DANIEL J. MURPHY is a shareholder in Bernstein Shur's *Business Law and Litigation Practice Groups*, where his practice concentrates on business and commercial litigation matters.

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