SANDY BAGGETT: MODERN CAREER WARRIOR
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SANDY WORKMAN BAGGETT is our Modern Career Warrior for January 2020. This article is the first in a series of mid-career retrospective interviews featuring inspiring and innovative professionals at AnneMarieSegal.com.

My interview with Sandy covers her journey from Judge Advocate (JAG) and Captain in the U.S. Army to federal criminal defense attorney based in Spokane, Washington. She is eagerly awaiting Spokane’s “real winter” - with an average of eight to ten inches of snow - and loving every minute of it!

We also take a world tour of Sandy’s roles as a prosecutor on three continents, including with the Bronx District Attorney’s Office (New York City), Serious Fraud Office (London) and Attorney General’s Chambers (Singapore), and as a criminal defense attorney at a top U.K. firm, Freshfields Bruckhaus Deringer (Singapore and New York City).

Holding a highly prolific career, Sandy has led at least ten “once in a lifetime” cases and was recognized as one of the top 100 women in criminal investigations by Global Investigations Review. Her global expertise has given her a remarkable level of flexibility to create her own career trajectory. Finally, I couldn’t resist getting the scoop on her house renovations, including a chicken coop in the backyard, as a single mom of three boys.

AMS: When I met you around 20 years ago, you were a JAG Corps lawyer, married and living in a cozy house in New Jersey with a quaint front porch.

SWB: Don't put that in! About the 20 years, I mean.

AMS: Do you remember your push-up challenge? One time you had at least eight friends over one evening, and you could do more push-ups than the rest of us combined.

You can find the full interview online at AnneMarieSegal.com/mcw-sandy-baggett.
**SWB:** That does sound like me. Always up for a challenge.

**AMS:** Fitness hasn't changed about your life, but it seems like just about everything else has.

**SWB:** I'm the same person I've always been, just more confident of myself and closer to my core. And yes, I am all about keeping healthy and exercising.

**AMS:** Speaking of challenges (and physical fitness), how did your early work in the Army set you up for the rest of your career?

**SWB:** Military training is truly unparalleled. One of the most important things you learn is how to be an integral part of a well-functioning team. It translates to everything else in your career.

**AMS:** Your next stop was an apartment in Queens, and you moved from JAG to the Bronx D.A.

**SWB:** Yep. We lived in an up-and-coming neighborhood in Long Island City, with a great view of Manhattan from our rooftop!

The D.A. was where I learned to prep, lead and win important cases. I specialized in violent crimes, like murder and armed robbery by drug gangs. I also worked on the Cold Case Squad.

**AMS:** Like the show *Cold Case* with Kathryn Morris?

**SWB:** [laughs.] Not exactly like that, but some of the cases were pretty compelling. And it’s important work.

**AMS:** Then you moved to Singapore. Literally on the other side of the planet.
SWB: Yes, it was quite a change. I loved it there. We moved after my ex-husband was offered an expat role with a U.S. firm. Neither of us spoke Chinese, but that didn’t stop us. I didn’t have a work visa at first but soon joined the law faculty at the National University of Singapore.

AMS: And you started a family in Singapore.

SWB: That’s right. As you know, when I was younger, I was never really focused on having children. But I ended up having three, all boys, and never looked back.

AMS: Career-wise, what was your next move?

SWB: I became a Prosecutor with the Attorney General's Chambers focused on Financial and Securities Offenses, which are looming issues in Singapore (just like everywhere else), especially because of its strategic location in Asia.

AMS: What was that like?

SWB: It took everything I learned in the D.A.'s office and brought it to a much larger scale. I was prosecuting all of the major crimes under international law: corruption, wire fraud, money laundering, sanctions, you name it.... I also became a global expert on U.S. and U.N. sanctions on North Korea and continue to get calls about that here in Spokane.

AMS: You told me that you’re fortunate to have had at least ten “once in a lifetime” cases in your career as a federal prosecutor. Can you tell us about a few of them?

SWB: Two were especially interesting. In one case, I prosecuted Chinpo Shipping after they financed a shipment of nuclear weapons on route from Cuba to North Korea. It was the first criminal prosecution for violations of U.N. sanctions of financial assistance to North Korea's nuclear weapons programs. It was covered in the Washington Post and other publications.1

AMS: Like your earlier cold cases, this sounds like it could be the plot of a movie.

SWB: So true! The other is the Rolls Royce global corruption case. I collaborated on that prosecution during my secondment to the Serious Fraud Office in London. We generally think of Rolls Royce for cars, but these were multi million-dollar bribes for government contracts in their aircraft and energy divisions. The Department of Justice (DOJ) coordinated a $170M global settlement agreement.2

And last year I was recognized as one of the top 100 women in criminal investigations by Global Investigations Review.3 That was rewarding. I was honored to be among such good company.

AMS: How did you decide to leave government service in Singapore to join a top international law firm? Was that something you have always wanted to do?

SWB: I never had a feeling that I missed out on practicing with a top firm, but it seemed like I shouldn’t pass up the opportunity if it was available. I started to realize just how valuable my skills and high-level connections were. Encouraged by top recruiter Alex Wiseman, I decided to
take a chance and apply for a few roles at U.S. and U.K. firms. Freshfields seemed like the best fit. I liked the people and what they were working on, so I went with them.

**AMS:** You joined them as Counsel.

**SWB:** I had a soft commitment that they would work to get me into the partnership, but it's not something that's really put in writing.

**AMS:** I know you worked for them in Singapore and New York. Did you also work in London?

**SWB:** I was working out of the Singapore office and part of the Asia practice, but I had a year-long secondment in New York City and went very regularly to the mother ship [in London]. The idea was for me to learn more about the firm and round out my skill set while adding value in my key areas of expertise and bringing in new clients, all of which I did.

**AMS:** Was it a good experience overall?

**SWB:** It was my first foray into Big Law, so I wasn’t quite sure what to expect. I learned a ton about defense-side litigation. Some of the partners were great mentors, such as Adam Siegel and Dan Braun. They were fond of saying helpful things like “sometimes a two-paragraph email is more useful than a 20-page memo.”

Freshfields also gave me perspective on defending companies versus individuals and greater transparency into the motivations behind certain decisions (which are not always what prosecutors assume and often purely monetary). I also delved into internal investigations and made board presentations on what we found. Overall, I had some really great opportunities.

**AMS:** So why did you decide to leave the firm? And move across the U.S. to Spokane?

**SWB:** Large law firms have an uneven track record of assimilating senior lawyers that they bring into their ranks. It was clear that my vision for my career at Freshfields did not align with theirs.

**AMS:** Did you first look for another job in New York?

**SWB:** I did interview with a few firms and got three offers, but none of them were the right fit. It's extremely expensive to live in NYC, and I would have to put in many more hours than I want to invest at this point in my life.

**AMS:** How did you feel about that? Or rather, did you ever have a “freak out” moment and think “what the hell am I going to do next?” How do you keep it going?

**SWB:** Many times. Daily. Even now!

I was just having this conversation with someone the other day about the depression and anxiety that can come with entrepreneurship, which I was reading about in an [Inc.com](https://www.inc.com) article.4 People don’t own up enough to that.
But the real freak-out time for me was back in Singapore, when I was trying to decide whether to stay or move back to the U.S. I was excited about moving and some pieces were falling into place that made the decision to leave easier. But it’s really hard to get a job in a foreign country (even your own) when you aren’t there. I couldn’t figure out where I should land or how long it would take me to find something.

**AMS:** Were you interviewing at that point or just in deep contemplation mode?

**SWB:** Oh yes, I was interviewing! I was pretty far along [in the interview process] with several prosecutors’ offices in New York, but the funding to hire people was pulled. That was really frustrating. I also was working with a headhunter and targeting small boutique firms in NYC that needed someone for white collar defense for high-net-worth individuals and independent counsel to CEOs of companies under investigation. My background is perfect for that.

Eventually, I gave about four months’ notice at Freshfields without another job in hand. I didn’t even know where I planned to live. The idea of moving to Spokane came from a friend who’s a private equity real estate investor and had done extensive research on places to move in the U.S.

**AMS:** So how did you get from “top places to live” to choosing one? And why Spokane?

**SWB:** Other than the fact that it's the best city in the world? [Laughs.]

A prosecutor job opened up in Spokane, and I applied to it on a whim. They got back to me and said, “please come interview,” so I did. Although the boys and I had vacationed near here, it was the first time I had set foot in the city.

I stayed downtown and drove around to see different neighborhoods. On the same trip, I met up with defense attorney, Jay McIntyre, who works at the federal public defender’s office.
AMS: To work there?

SWB: To get his opinion about opportunities in Spokane and the possibility of going out on my own as a defense attorney. I asked him everything, like “what’s the market? what’s possible?”

It was entirely fortuitous that I made the right connection who invested in me. I don’t think I could have done this – actually, I wouldn’t have done it – if I hadn’t gotten the confidence from Jay and the other defense attorneys I met through him.

AMS: So what sealed the deal?

SWB: I did a lot of due diligence and thought about it from every perspective I could.

Would the work be interesting? Would it pay enough? Did I want to raise my kids here?

I also calculated my “hourly wage” at a big law firm – working hours against total compensation – and I realized that what I could make per hour wasn’t much less. But I could work a lot less hours, because it’s so much more affordable here. Spokane has a lot of the benefits of a big city without the downsides. So that’s what finally sealed the decision for me.

AMS: Once you knew Spokane was your target, what was the next step?

SWB: Everything happened really quickly at that point. I turned down all the offers in New York, came back with the kids, looked at houses for four days and put in an offer. When they accepted, I went back to Singapore, moved everything out, gave the movers my new address and just “up and moved.” The whole process took about two months.

AMS: Is it everything you imagined it would be?

SWB: The change was so dramatic that sometimes I feel like I jumped off a cliff! When we first arrived, there were some very dark days (literally, since it was December). I wanted to get settled and was prepared for an initial loss of income, but I found myself suddenly in a panic. The hardest part wasn’t the financial piece, it was the emotional aspect.

AMS: What happened?

SWB: I was spending days painting walls and modernizing my 1930s house. I really missed being crafty in Singapore, where everything is new, and I was having a blast. But I also realized that a huge part of my self-esteem is tied to working, so I was a bit stir crazy at the same time.

AMS: Even though you love renovating?

SWB: Right. And there was even some drama to make it interesting.

AMS: You mean the racoons?
SWB: Yes! When we lived in Singapore, we swam every day, but we were at the equator. Here, even in the second week of August, the water is cold, so I wanted to add a heater to the swimming pool.

We aren’t the only ones who like to swim, I found out. Racoons would come, get woozy on the catnip in our herb garden and take a half-drunken dive into the pool. All caught on the security camera system we installed!

AMS: I remember you telling me. Unbelievable. So you started getting some clients, and that helped you settle in. What about a support system? Did you find that too?

SWB: Actually, right after I found the house and school for the kids, the very next thing I sought out was CrossFit. Anyone who’s into CrossFit knows they tend to be very close-nit, supportive people, and of course there’s the exercise that comes along with it.

AMS: From a big picture perspective, what made you decide to launch your own practice?

SWB: I had pursued some other DOJ positions, but none of them really worked out. I felt profound age discrimination, and there was the obvious challenge of trying to join organization where you have at least two or three times the amount of experience of the person you’ll be working for. By then, I had been a prosecutor for three countries, and people kept assuming I would be bored [in the roles for which I was interviewing].

I started thinking out of the box. I actually like practicing law, so I thought going back to “street crime” and criminal work would be a good choice. I wanted to get back to the basics.

I met with a number of lawyers I knew in New York whom I admired and the local ones I had met here, and they all said the same thing: start with court-appointed work, build your reputation among other lawyers and grow a referral-based business.

AMS: How are you working to build your practice?

SWB: I am approaching it from a number of different angles, and surprisingly prior clients have tracked me down. One even found me through a Google search.

My expertise from my Singapore days continues to carry weight. If you ever find that you have inadvertently financed a weapon in North Korea, I am the one to call. It is more common among multinational corporations than you can imagine, but I can’t give any details of course.

AMS: Of course. But tell more me about your practice. Do you have employees? An office?

SWB: At this point, it’s just me. I do have a dedicated office in a funky old building downtown. It’s roomy, quirky and gutted with exposed brick. I’m surrounded by start-ups and private equity guys, so I feel very comfortable there. And I always have a suit ready for court. But really, my “office” can be wherever I am most comfortable working at the time.
AMS: Now that’s a well-earned type of lifestyle, isn’t it?

SWB: One of my best days ever was when I said goodbye to my beautiful Brooks Brothers suits, tight little pencil skirts and trendy Italian high-heeled shoes. I kept three suits and donated the rest. There is no reason lawyers can’t take advantage of technology to live well and do well by their clients. High-level, creative work isn’t a product of fancy suits and slick offices!

AMS: Speaking of high-level work, what keeps you busy nowadays?

SWB: I do a lot of high-level legal analysis and give strategic advice, since I know the issues and the players inside and out. Most of my private clients right now are legacy clients who sought me out, such as companies under investigation by the DOJ. They hire another big law firm to handle the primary case, and once they figure all of that out, I write a legal opinion.

I also do more “regular” and court-appointed litigation work at the federal level, and I write briefs for local lawyers. I very quickly got a reputation for being a top-notch legal researcher and writer, and many people are happy to pass on that type of work. I like the variety much more than sitting in an office all day.

And since last May, I am also teaching at Gonzaga Law School and developing online legal courses for them, starting with criminal procedure.

AMS: You also mentioned a prior client tracking you down through a Google search. Is social media a large part of your business development?

SWB: Not really, actually. It's not a big part of my leads at the moment.

AMS: And you must know that you break the general rule I give my clients on LinkedIn profile photos with the current image you have posted, right? It's much more Sharon Stone than a conservative shot of a high-level litigation attorney. But you thought it was worth the risk.

SWB: As I said, I was tired of the suits. I made a conscious choice to be contrarian with that photo. That's how I market myself. I told the photographer I wanted a photo that catches people's
attention and prompts them to say, “Wow, I need to have a conversation with her!” Even in the age of #MeToo – or especially now – we have to own our power.

AMS: I'm going to include that shot in the article [first image above], in case you change it. OK?

SWB: Sure, why not? And the other portrait too. It’s a very happy memory, a decisive moment from a trip to New York. Just then, I had finally made up my mind where I was heading.

AMS: Now that you've had your practice for a while, do you think it's a viable option long term?

SWB: I'm open to the possibilities, but at this point I don't see any reason to change. You don't have nearly the overhead of a large firm, so you keep much more of what you make. And I am getting some really interesting work.

AMS: How specifically, other than your North Korea expertise, are you marketing yourself?

SWB: I've done a lot to raise my profile in the local community, including meeting partners at big Northeast U.S. firms who have a presence in Spokane. I also was admitted in Idaho. There’s a federal court just across the state line, so I can take cases there as well. I've been on industry panels and am lining up some presentations on topics such as board member liability.

AMS: Last question. What advice do you have for younger attorneys?
SWB: I put a lot of energy into being a champion for younger lawyers at Freshfields and the prosecutor’s office. I consider it part of my professional responsibility. My biggest advice has always been, “if you want something, ask for it.” The worst they can say is no. Women in particular need to learn for ask for things, and sometimes men as well. Don’t assume you’ll get it; you need to ask for it.

AMS: Fabulous advice.

SWB: A large part of my professional success is that when I’m at a job and see great work coming down the pike (amazing legal issues, explosive press coverage, etc.), I will go to boss and say, “I think that’s great work, I want in on it.” The best stuff in my career has come out of my willingness to do that.

AMS: Well it has certainly paid off!

Oops, I lied. One more question. Can you tell us about your chickens?

SWB: Oh yes. We can’t forget the chickens!

The chickens were my middle son’s idea. When we were looking at houses, before we moved, and one had a chicken coop. I was floored. The realtor said people in Spokane are very farm-to-table, and I answered that I would never have chickens. Famous last words.

As we looked at more houses, we saw more and more chicken coops. The idea even seemed kind of charming by the end of the trip, but I was far from seriously considering it. So my son did more research, took me to a talk at a local feed store and did a lot of other “soft maneuvers.”

Tiny chicks are so cute when they are only a few days old, and he knew he was starting to break me. Finally, he pulled the full-stop, kid-style guilt trip: “why in the [---] did we move to Spokane if we aren’t going to do things like raise chickens?”
AMS: And now you have chickens.

SWB: Yep. I realized he was right. Why shouldn’t we have chickens in Spokane?

So we did it in style. We watched expert videos on YouTube and built a walk-in chicken coop. It even has stools (to sit inside with them) and a radiator for the winter. The boys treat them as pets.

When the weather is warm, we get as many as three to four eggs a day. We had to start giving them to friends. The chickens are super cute and really funny. My favorite is the fluffy white one who looks like a boa. My son named her Beyoncé.

MODERN CAREER WARRIORS

Technology, the “gig economy” and globalization have irrevocably altered the modern career. Launched in January 2020, Modern Career Warriors is a series on AnneMarieSegal.com that explores the lives of professionals leading robust, resilient and multi-dimensional careers.

DEPTH, COURAGE AND INTENSITY radiate from these Modern Career Warriors, who defy the odds and define their own paths. While they may, like the rest of us, feel side-lined or even defeated at times, their inner drive keeps driving them to their own personal best and inspires others to do the same.

The full version of this interview is available at AnneMarieSegal.com/mcw-sandy-baggett.

Anne Marie Segal, founder of Segal Coaching LLC, is an executive coach, resume writer and author of two well-received books on interviewing and career development. She served as a corporate attorney for 15 years, including roles at White & Case LLP and a prominent hedge and private equity fund manager, before launching her coaching practice.

Based in Connecticut not far from New York City, Anne Marie partners with clients internationally on executive presence, impactful communications, graceful transitions and other aspects of professional and personal development.