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Education

She once stood before a judge as a juvenile delinquent. Now, she's practicing law.

Carmen Day, a South Jersey woman who got a second chance as a juvenile delinquent, fulfilled her dream to become a lawyer and wants to inspire others.



Carmen Day poses for a portrait with her diploma from Rutgers Camden Law in front of the law offices of Brown & Connery in Collingswood. Day is a former juvenile delinquent who ... [Read more](#)
HEATHER KHALIFA / Staff Photographer

by Melanie Burney
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When the moment finally came, it was surreal for Carmen Day: She had accomplished her childhood dream to become a lawyer.

It began with a promise she made 13 years ago to a judge in Camden who showed her leniency when she stood before him as a juvenile delinquent. She could have faced prison time. Instead, she got a second chance.

Day, then 17, told the judge: “Maybe I’ll be a lawyer in your courtroom one

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That moment you look in the mirror and finally see the woman you were destined to be. Introducing Carmen Y. Day, J.D. 🙌❤️👩⚖️ #JurisDoctor #purplehood #lawgraduate #dreamsdocometrue #takeachanceonlaw #2020vision

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This week, Day began working as an associate at the [Brown & Connery](#) law firm in Westmont. She landed the position two months after obtaining a Juris Doctorate with honors from [Rutgers-Camden Law School](#). She is handling employment law cases.

"They put me to work right away, the first day," she said with a smile Friday in the firm's first-floor conference room. "It's been very exciting."

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Unlike most hires, Day didn't complete a summer internship at the firm or clerk with a judge.

"She had the smarts, was goal-driven and had the work ethic," Tambussi said. "This is the kind of person we want."

Her first exposure to the law had an ominous beginning when Day stood before Superior Court Judge Charles Dortch in December 2006. She had a plea agreement that called for 18 months' probation. She begged for leniency, and the judge reduced her sentence to six months.

Juvenile records are sealed, and Day has declined to disclose specifics about her case, including the charges she faced. She has said that she succumbed to peer pressure from her boyfriend and friends, and went down the wrong path.



Carmen Day was reunited with Family Court Judge Charles Dortch who gave her a second chance 13 years ago when she was 17. Now, Day is a lawyer at a South Jersey firm.

Courtesy of Carmen Day

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from law school to show him that she had kept her promise.

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”You normally don’t hear the positive outcomes that result from a person’s contact with the court system,” Dortch said. “She had a sense of purpose about her.”

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Dortch told Day he was proud of her. They posed for photographs and their story went viral, and she received messages from around the world. She has become a motivational speaker and a role model for young girls in Camden, where she grew up.

”This is my testimony. I hope by sharing that I can encourage someone to keep fighting and keep dreaming,” Day wrote in a social media post.

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In this file photo, Carmen Day poses for a photo on the Rutgers-Camden campus in Camden, N.J. Day was 17 years old when a Family Court judge in Camden gave her another chance.... [Read more](#)
HEATHER KHALIFA / MCT

When she started law school in 2017, her husband, Dwayne, encouraged her to attend full-time. The mother of two young daughters, she took as many credits as she could and graduated in December, a semester early. She received her law degree by mail this week.

"I have been through a lot. I kept telling myself, 'You are going to be a lawyer.' "

Day submitted a flurry of job applications while studying to take the bar exam in February. She received four offers and in January accepted the position with Brown & Connery, where she is one of three black lawyers.

"I'm living my best life," said Day. "I'm on the brink of so much greatness."

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Melanie is the New Jersey education writer, based in Mount Laurel, focusing on issues and trends in public and charter schools.

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