



DAN BLEGEN



CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Member Social**August 24**

McCormick & Schmick's

YLS Beer Tasting**September 7**

KCMBA Conference Center

Liberty & Justice Gala**September 9**

The Gallery Event Space

Member Social**September 28**

JJ's

Member Social**October 19**

No Other Pub

Annual Meeting**December 8**

Sheraton Crown Center

Holiday Party**December 14**

KCMBA Conference Center

There's No Telling Where It Starts or How It Ends¹

I am Missouri lawyer number 47276. I was assigned that number in the Fall of 1995 when I started law school at Mizzou. I have typed that number on countless pleadings and other documents I have prepared over the past 22 years, and it is how the courts in Missouri tell me apart from all the other lawyers before me and since.

Throughout this year, I have focused KCMBA on the similarities and differences between generations of lawyers in Kansas City and beyond. This month, I wanted to take that question to the lawyers themselves. As there is no way to talk to everyone, I interviewed what I call the Ten Thousand Lawyer Club.² That is, I found the lawyers assigned Missouri Bar numbers in increments of 10,000 from mine.³

Lawyer 27276 is Elizabeth Gaye Thomas. Gaye is not only 20,000 lawyers before me, she graduated from the Mizzou law school exactly 20 years before me in 1978. She was known as Liz to her classmates, to whom she says hello. Gaye found herself in law school for what she now knows were the wrong reasons. Gaye wanted to get her Ph.D. in history and become a college professor, but her faculty advisor – presumably trying to be helpful – told her that there were too many history Ph.D.s and she should go to a “vocational” school, like law school. Gaye didn’t know anything about law, with her entire knowledge coming from seeing defense lawyers on television. But, having been discouraged from her true passion, and wanting to annoy her father who did not hold enlightened views on education for women, Gaye went to law school.

Gaye hated the practice of law. Her career started in Kansas City, which she loved, but the practice was not what she wanted. Luckily, after moving to Tennessee and starting a family, she landed in an in-house counsel position at a hospital. Despite having no background in business, she was like “a pig in mud” and thrived in that world. Now, after 20 years in the corporate world that allowed her to retire early, Gaye is back to doing what she should have done in 1975 – history research and genealogy.

If she could do it all over again, Gaye would never have gone to law school. She feels it made her become someone she wasn’t, and her advice to young people considering law as a profession is to know that you will be stereotyped and are probably better off studying business.

Lawyer 57276 is Brian Reinhold. Brian graduated from Washington University School of Law in 2004, a mere 6 years after me. That narrow gap tells us a lot about the sheer number of young lawyers who flooded the market between 1995 and 2005. Brian went to law school with a degree in mechanical engineering and a plan to get into patent litigation, but three weeks after he started at Wash U., 9/11 happened and the

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***STOP the Litigation Madness!******“It pays to work it out.”***

legal market shifted. After graduation, Brian started in insurance defense and, after a few years doing patent litigation and a few years in a solo practice, landed in-house with Lutheran Senior Services in St. Louis.

Brian thought law practice was going to be more like television, but has found that creative problem solving is much more of the practice than he anticipated. Now that he is in-house, he enjoys approaching legal problems knowing how they fit into the overall business plan and structure of the company.

If Brian was to start over, he would still go to law school. But in law school, he would take more classes on transactional law and patent drafting. As for young people interested in law, Brian recommends working or interning for lawyers to really understand what lawyers do before committing to law school. He also recommends getting an engineering degree to start.

Lawyer 67276 is Cort VanOstran.⁴ Cort is a 2014 graduate of Washington University School of Law. Cort always wanted to be a lawyer, envisioning himself representing people in need and pursuing justice. After a year as an associate at Shook, Hardy & Bacon in Kansas City, Cort had an opportunity to clerk on the United States District Court for the Eastern District of Missouri, and has since landed at Gray, Ritter & Graham in St. Louis.

Cort considers himself a “typical Millennial” with a focus on public service and meeting the call. He sees in his generation a commitment to a broader mission of justice. Like Brian, 9/11 was a defining moment for Cort, the result of which Cort describes a sense of “oneness” – that we are all in this together. That life view has influenced Cort’s approach to law school and in his career thus far.

Cort, still a young lawyer, says his biggest surprise as a lawyer is how much trust and authority clients give to a young lawyer. He sees that as the real weight to a law degree, as people look to you to be a leader.

If he were to start over, Cort would still go to law school. He, like many young lawyers, is concerned that the system of financing legal education is an issue that needs to be addressed as the debt load necessary to get a law degree becomes an impediment to

young lawyers when choosing how to use their degree.

So what do we learn from the Ten Thousand Lawyer Club? From Gaye, we are reminded that people go to law school for many different reasons. From Brian, we learn that world events may alter our path in ways we never anticipated. From Cort, we can be inspired by the optimism of youth and we are reminded of the weight placed on the opinions of those of us who obtained degrees in law.

The conversations I had in preparing this month’s column and the opportunities I have had to work with Task Force M this year have illustrated for me the importance of communication between older lawyers, young lawyers, and those like me in the middle of their career. There’s no telling where one person’s decision to become a lawyer begins or where it ends, but we can all learn from and be inspired by one another. ■

¹ 10,000 Maniacs, Trouble Me, on Blind Man’s Zoo (Elektra Records, 1989)

² Special thanks for KCMBA Member, and loyal reader, Sam Burnett, who provided the idea for this column. Reader feedback is always appreciated.

³ I was never able to reach lawyer 37276, but I understand he is still a Missouri lawyer in good standing and works in Chicago in the financial services industry.

⁴ As Cort notes, he has the only palindrome bar number of our Ten Thousand Lawyer Club.

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