

# The Summer of 42



Lawrence P. Nolan

**F**or some of us, the title of this article evokes memories of an iconic 1971 movie about a young boy named Hermie spending a summer on the island of Nantucket with his best friend, Oscy, and his nerdy younger friend, Benjie, and the experience of meeting a woman named Dorothy, whose husband had gone off to war.

The summer of 42 of which I write, however, has nothing to do with the movie or the year 1942. It simply marks and celebrates the anniversary of my 42nd year of private practice at the same location on Main Street in Eaton Rapids. So far, it has been a summer that has taken me from one end of this beautiful state to the other.

I travel the state knowing that this is, in essence, my farewell tour as president of the State Bar of Michigan. It is a culmination of years of practicing law in a small town and being a lifelong resident of the state. It brings an end to my more than 14 years on the State Bar Board of Commissioners. I realize I have gone far beyond any expectations I had growing up in Michigan.

My summers have left me with fond memories of fishing, swimming, picnicking, camping, and traveling up north with

family. My father and mother always made time to take my brother, two sisters, and me to the great northern lakes and state parks in Michigan. As I travel the state now, I recall vivid memories of Mackinaw City, Mackinac Island, Mullet Lake, Cheboygan, the Upper Peninsula, the Mackinac Bridge, Tahquamenon Falls, Pictured Rocks, Sea Shell City, and, of course, Mystery Spot.

My year in office has gone by at lightning speed. I have met new friends and rekindled memories with old friends I haven't seen in a number of years.

I have been fortunate to have experienced many special things during my lifetime. This year was made even more special with great blessings as my daughter, Bridget, gave birth to our first grandchild. Nolan Robert Rohs was born on Monday, February 20, 2017, at Bronson Hospital in Kalamazoo at 7:07 p.m. weighing 7 pounds, 7 ounces. He was 21 inches long, and if you divide that number by himself and his two parents, it results in the magic number 7. You already know what number he will wear on his hockey jersey. Simply put, he is healthy, happy, beautiful, and, not surprisingly, loved by all.

Nolan was able to make his first trip up north to Trout Camp near Mesick and his first trip to Mackinac Island where he stayed at the Grand Hotel, swam in Paul Bunyan's

footstep pool, and experienced his first horse-drawn carriage ride with his father at the reins. Grandma, Grandpa, and Mama were happy to ride along.

Another blessing special to us is that our son, Patrick (Lawrence Patrick Nolan Jr.), successfully completed his 14-year journey as a student to become a doctor, graduating from his medical residency in Stuart, Florida, a few weeks ago. He worked long and hard to reach his goals, but as I have told him all along, success does not always come easy. You pay a price to reach a goal in life, and when you reach that goal, it makes the accomplishment all the more satisfying.

As you can tell, my wife, Laurel, and I are so proud of both our children as well as our son-in-law, Eric Rohs, who is definitely in the running for Father of the Year for 2017.

It has also been a blessing that Laurel continues to be cancer free. She remains healthy and has continued her tremendous volunteer work in the community, helping everyone in our neighborhood and closing in on 30 years of volunteering at Sparrow Hospital. She looks forward to my having more time to spend with her and our little furry companion, Zoey, a 9-pound, 14-year-old Yorkshire terrier whom we adore and cherish.

When I was sworn in by Michigan Supreme Court Chief Justice Robert Young

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last September, I made a promise to myself and the other members of the State Bar of Michigan to sing the praises of what we do as lawyers, what our judges do, and what thousands of our support staff and courts do all across this state. I pledged to speak about the meaning we give to the courts, to the public, and to the plaintiffs, defendants, witnesses, and victims who willingly or unwillingly become immersed in the justice system.

People in our civilized society understand we are problem solvers. We can solve the smallest and most difficult problems people face. Whatever turmoil has been inflicted on the individuals coming within the jurisdiction of the courts, we know they are dealing with the greatest problems in their lives.

It makes no difference whether the matter is criminal or civil in nature. It makes no difference whether the individual is a plaintiff or a defendant. It makes no difference if the individuals are facing incarceration or a money judgment for or against them. It can be a drunk-driving charge or a first-degree murder charge. We argue, present, and rule on the law.

Most often, the litigants come to us unwillingly. They are not in our offices and courtrooms for a six-month dental checkup. They don't want to be in court. They don't want to file suit or be sued. They come to us because the problems in their lives are out of control and they have nowhere else to turn.

In my travels throughout Michigan this summer, I have sung the praises of what we, as officers of the court, do every day, and what our system of justice does.

I have traveled from Marquette to Iron Mountain; from Benton Harbor to Hastings; from Mount Pleasant to St. Ignace; from Lansing to Houghton Hancock. There

has been no bar association too big or too small to visit—not the Berrien County Bar Association nor the Van Buren County Bar Association; not the Barry, Calhoun, Copper Country, Dickinson, Eaton, Emmet-Charlevoix, Genesee, Gogebic-Ontonagon, Grand Traverse, Ingham, Iron Mountain, Isabella, Jackson, Leelanau-Antrim, Livingston, Macomb, Marquette, Oakland, Ottawa, St. Clair, Tuscola, or Washtenaw county bars; not the Federal Bar for the Eastern District nor the Incorporated Society of Irish-American Lawyers; not the Davis-Dunnings, Detroit, Oakland, Rochester, Straker, or Wolverine bar associations; not the Animal Law, Family Law, Master Lawyers, Social Security, Solo Practice, or Young Lawyers sections; not the Black Women Lawyers Association, the John Voelker Society, the Michigan Judges Association, or the Women Lawyers Association.

We are keenly aware that our profession is not an exact science. It is a system of justice administered by human beings, not machines or robots. Is it a perfect system? By no means. Is it the best system in a civilized society? Absolutely.

We live in a free world. We live in a democracy that affords us the protection of the Constitution, and we live by what we call in this society the rule of law.

For 42 years, I have been proud to be a lawyer. For 42 years, I have been proud to be a member of this great organization called the State Bar of Michigan.

Being the spokesperson for the State Bar is one of the reasons this summer will be unforgettable. It is a privilege to be a lawyer, and it has been my privilege as State Bar president to cross the state to say thank you for all you do.

The great American poet Maya Angelou said, "[P]eople will forget what you said,

people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you have made them feel." If I have done nothing more in my year as State Bar president, I hope I have made all of you feel good about what you accomplish in our justice system. For me, there is no better profession.

Recently, I spoke at a Michigan Judges Association luncheon and to the Women Lawyers Association of Mid-Michigan that same evening. I am scheduled to return to the beautiful Upper Peninsula soon to speak to the lawyers and judges there for the third time during my term. As I sprint to the finish line at the State Bar of Michigan NEXT Conference in Detroit in September, I can only think of how honored I am by what we do.

For me, there is not a higher professional calling. We give reason to those who are unreasonable. We give those without a voice a chance to speak. It is most important that the members of the public we serve not only feel that they have a voice, but are given the opportunity to speak and be heard. Their stories are told in hundreds of courtrooms every day around the state.

My travels have convinced me that members of the State Bar of Michigan take their jobs seriously and perform them professionally. We are reminded daily that we deal with serious—even life-threatening—issues. The cases we deal with are so serious at times, we put our lives on the line; recall the attack on a prosecutor in an Ingham County courtroom or the shooting deaths of two security officers in a Berrien County courthouse. These tragic incidents are reminders of how important our representation, prosecution, or judgment is in determining guilt or innocence or in bringing a case before the court.

It certainly isn't the same as when I started practicing law 42 years ago. It seems there is an even greater need for the rule of law regarding the decisions affecting the lives of others.

In the months I have left in my term as State Bar president, I will continue to do the best I can in speaking about all the good things lawyers and judges do. The summer of 42 is certainly beautiful in Michigan, and one I am sure I will never forget. ■