

It is Never Too Late

By Tish Vincent

Evidence class was held in Room 472 at Michigan State University College of Law. The fourth-floor classroom was auditorium style with chairs loaded on springs and a bench for a desk. Just as family members often have a preferred chair at the dinner table, law students tend to pick a favorite seat in the classroom. I sat next to Bryan Kennedy, two-thirds of the way up the steps to the right of the aisle.

We were sitting in our spots before class one day. I was turning on my computer and Bryan was retrieving his notebook and pen for taking lecture notes. Bryan turned and asked, “Gee, Tish, why are you in law school? I would think you would be planning on retiring rather than toughing out another professional degree!”

At 52, I was the oldest student in my law school class. Why wasn’t I thinking of retirement instead of another professional degree? Seventeen years as a social worker had piqued my interest in the law. I found great satisfaction in continuing to learn and experience a new world. My dual careers brought me to the State Bar of Michigan and the Lawyers and Judges Assistance Program, which is where I met Molly Dean.

I was impressed with Molly’s respect for her clients, her thoughtful approach to every decision, and her comfortable manner of communicating with others. As I got to know her on a personal level, I found we had much in common, having built one successful career before venturing out to build another later in life. Molly will be retiring soon. Here are her thoughts as she gracefully transitions to a new phase in life.

Dear Colleagues,

Since my intended retirement from the State Bar of Michigan was announced a few weeks ago, I’ve had several colleagues

refer to me as a “short-timer.” I take that to mean I have minimal time left—not in life (I hope), but at the State Bar. The comments have been both congratulatory and wistful; perhaps there is a bit of envy attached? I think it’s fair to say that most people wonder what retirement will bring; fanaticize, romanticize, and dream about it for themselves; and have verbalized those fantasies by way of offering suggestions to me should I get bored or stumble around looking for something interesting to accomplish. I have some ideas of what would constitute a great retirement adventure, but I know that life has its own way of meandering. At this moment, I’m not making any hard and fast plans except to take one day at a time and live it as fully and intentionally as I am able.

My June 30 departure means I will have worked at the State Bar for one month shy of six years, first as an intern and then as a full-time clinician in the Lawyers and Judges Assistance Program. In all, I have worked a total of 50 years, starting at the age of 15 when I held babysitting jobs that paid 50 cents an hour. Most of my adult life was spent at Michigan State University, initially as an undergraduate student and working part-time jobs to pay my way through school. I used my bachelor’s degree in elementary education for a year of substitute teaching and then began a 35-year stint with MSU’s Department of Libraries. At age 48, I returned to grad school to earn my master’s

degree in counseling from Western Michigan University while continuing to work full time. Nearly a dozen years later, I’d earned my master’s degree and certification as a licensed professional counselor, retired from MSU, and began working at the State Bar. I went on to earn my Michigan advanced addictions certification and helped raise two children along the way—another kind of career. Some years I struggled greatly and others went smoothly. I’ve had my share of complaints about the problems at hand, but have also learned to keep my mouth shut and my brain engaged, using more listening than loud-mouthing skills. This *older dog* has learned a lot of new tricks.

I’m proud of what I’ve accomplished during a period in history in which women became a much larger part of the workforce and made significant contributions to their families, communities, and the world. In spite of my father’s opinion that “women didn’t need to go to college,” all five of his daughters did—milestones in his life and ours. I hope I never forget the many gifts of all the women and men who have come before me and upon whose shoulders I have had the privilege of standing. I’ve witnessed many technological changes during the past 50 years; wherever I’ve worked, there has been an abundance of them to learn and incorporate into my work, sometimes with enthusiasm and other times with resistance. The pace of technology is

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fast and furious, and I will welcome a slow-down to what I *care* to learn.

I've worked with and for many diverse folks from the world over who have taught me important lessons about the prizes and perils inherent in being human. I've had a much less than perfect run but learned a ton. In retrospect, I think I've learned and

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experienced the most growth from those clients, colleagues, and situations that were difficult. I was challenged to adopt some new and interesting tools and skills to survive and thrive. I learned that we all are multidimensional and have competencies and vulnerabilities that need both expression and acceptance. Patience is a worthy implement for navigating the work place, and I still need to practice it.

I thank all of you for the gifts you have bestowed upon me—tangible and intangible—during my time at the State Bar. I am grateful. I bless you and wish you all good things.

* * *

We thank Molly for her graceful presence, strength, and dedication to her clients, colleagues, and the Lawyers and Judges Assistance Program. We will miss her more than we can say. We wish her well! ■



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