



John T. Berry

Bazooka Gum, M&M's, Play Doh, and a Generation Worthy of Praise

It all started in 1954—Bazooka Gum, M&M's, Play Doh, and the Legal Career of 51 Michigan lawyers. As grateful as I am for all of the above (just smelling Play Doh brings back some great memories), I can't begin to express how grateful I am to be in the same profession that the lawyers who began practicing in 1954 helped shape.

Yes, I know all too well from my discipline work that our profession has many problems, but it also has much to be proud of and these fine lawyers deserve much more than their pro rata share of the recognition for the good our profession does.

What follows are slightly revised selected excerpts from my remarks at the celebration honoring their careers:

In 1999 I visited Mecca, the Roy Rogers Museum in California. Unfortunately, I missed Roy and Dale, but I did get lucky enough to meet and visit with their son. I told him Roy and Dale were my heroes as I grew up.

As I matured and as I learned more about their lives committed to family and faith (despite many hard times), I appreciated the fact that they were truly heroes. As I explained to their son, I give many speeches to the lawyers of this nation on professionalism and on the need for heroes. He told me to wait a minute and he soon returned with some cardboard life-size cutouts of Roy. He said I could have them free if I promised once in a while at

just the right speech to use them to illustrate the importance of heroes.

The Golden Celebration for our 50-year members is one of those rare Roy Roger days! Beside me stands Roy to remind me, and hopefully to remind all, that heroes exist and many are here in this room.

In the book, *Lawyer's Myth*, by Walter Bennett, the author speaks of the role of lawyers in the '50s as that of heroes' with the following components:

*Pillar of Community
Lawyer Statesmen and Women
Champion of people and causes
Persons of great rectitude*

Justice Veasey of Delaware, a leader in the lawyer professionalism movement, has said "we are in a battle for the heart and soul of our profession." I might suggest if we were playing the childhood game of "hot and cold" looking for that heart and soul, that we would be in a heat wave in this very room.

We as a profession and as a society salute you today for what you have meant to us, do mean, and will continue to mean.

Allan B. Head of North Carolina wrote a *Bar Journal* article entitled, "We are a Strange Herd... but we Look Out for Each Other." Mr. Head referred to the animated movie, "Ice Age," where a mammoth named Manfred, a sloth named Sid, and a Saber Tooth Tiger named Diego go on a very surprising journey. This journey together, as Mr. Head described it, is one to protect a child, but each in their own way helped protect each other from one disaster after another—each time reaffirming, "we are a strange herd, but we look out for each other."

Well, you have led this herd for going on 50 years, and you have done it through many changes that could have led to disaster, but instead has led to great possibilities.

You are to be celebrated for all you have done for your profession and society, but let's not ignore just plain longevity of service and perseverance. Winston Churchill is quoted as saying, "Never, Never, Never Give Up!" In a society where we give up way too easily on our commitments and where too many lawyers say they are not sure they want to stay lawyers when times get tough, *YOU* never gave up—not even in the toughest of times. We all have been better for it—as a profession and as a nation.

I will conclude by sharing with all here how I unexpectedly ended a commencement address at Cooley Law School.

As I looked around a full auditorium of proud relatives, lawyers, and lawyers-to-be, my stepson's face came to mind. He is a firefighter. I could see his resolute expression on a picture I have of him standing before a firefighter's memorial in honor of those who died in New York.

I thought of all the ovations rightfully given to firefighters, police, and military after 9/11. What struck me was I do not recall one standing ovation for those who, through their lifetime commitment to the rule of law (lawyers), gave us a nation for which so many are willing to serve or even give their lives. I ask of you in this audience the same thing I asked at Cooley—a standing loud and sustained ovation for those whose service and persevering spirit have handed to us a system of justice, far from perfect, but which allows us freedom and the same opportunity to serve.

Bazooka Gum, M&M's, Play Doh, and a generation of lawyers—that was one great year! God bless each of you for all you have done and for what you mean to our profession and nation. In my mind you are far greater heroes than Roy. From me, that is just about the greatest of compliments! ♦

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thoughts/concerns**

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