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# 50 Years of Service— Catalyst for Self-Reflection

On May 17, I again had the great privilege to help honor 50 lawyers who rendered 50 years of service to the State Bar of Michigan.\* It would be hard to measure whether those honoring these distinguished lawyers or the lawyers themselves got the most from the celebration.

I'll never forget the one attorney who literally jumped for joy with arms stretched to the ceiling in a "Rocky-like pose." His words: "I made it! I never thought I would make it, but I did." The sincere joy in his voice and in the hearts of all those around him made this one very special day.

Other remarkable memories included President Nancy Diehl giving a personal, warm, congratulatory hug to each attorney, with much time given to share thoughts with each person.

Guests and honorees came from all over Michigan and as far away as Georgia and California.

Part of the fun for the day was typical legal-like competition in a trivia remembrance contest from 1955. Test your knowledge of the following (answers provided at the bottom of this page):

- 1) James Dean died in 1955. What car did he crash?
  - a. Corvette Convertible
  - b. Porsche 550 Spyder
  - c. Triumph TR3
  - d. Jaguar XK 140 coupe
- 2) What movie won Best Motion Picture in 1955?
  - a. Marty
  - b. Mister Roberts
  - c. Love is a Many Splendored Thing
  - d. Law is a Many Splendored Thing

Trivia question answers: 1) b; 2) a; 3) b; 4) c

## A few comments from the 2005 50-year honorees:

The most memorable event in my career was:

- First day in practice when my father, brother and uncle (all lawyers) moved my admission to the bar; in two years I shall have the honor to move the admission of my grandson to the bar and that will be the second most memorable event
- Being notified while serving in the Army that I had passed the bar exam, which enabled me to have a career; the starting point is the most important
- First jury trial
- Mentoring present and future lawyers
- Reaching normal retirement age and being able to continue practicing until the present age of 80

The most important change in the practice of law is:

- Return to civility
- The tremendous expansion of the areas of practice and the increasing necessity of specialization
- The lowering of respect for lawyers by the public
- The increase of women in the profession, which has enriched the field

My hobbies/special interests are:

- Practice of law
- Coaching youth hockey
- Staying alive!

3) Cost of a first-class stamp in 1955?

- a. 1¢
- b. 3¢
- c. 7¢
- d. More than your hourly rate

4) There are more than 37,000 lawyers in Michigan in 2005. How many in 1955?

- a. 14,915
- b. 11,311
- c. 8,415
- d. About the same

As I included in my remarks to those attending, 1955 was a special year in my life as well.

I have a treasured black and white photograph of me with my grandmother as she was buying apples from an apple salesman in a local market. The apple salesman has an irritated look on his face, I have a stern look of determination, and my grandmother has a smiling face of approval shining toward me.

The inscription written at the bottom of the picture by the photographer, my aunt, at the time of the picture was "future lawyer."

The story, as told to me by my aunt, was that my grandmother had commented on the overpricing and the mediocre quality of the apples. The salesman did not appreciate the "constructive criticism" and had snapped at my grandmother.

It appears this young seven-year-old shot back to the salesman, “You don’t talk to my granny that way!”

The faith of my aunt and grandmother in my advocacy skills was just the encouragement a young boy needed to believe he not only could be an attorney, but that it was a noble thing to strive for.

Each of those honored for 50 years of service, beginning the year I first was introduced to the possibility of being an attorney, helped thousands of people in their life disputes.

We have inherited great traditions, and as the baton continues to be passed to each of us, may we value the opportunity to serve as much as they did.

It also was my privilege to attend another meeting within that same week with the council of the Young Lawyers Section. It was obvious that we have a new generation of lawyers becoming highly skilled with dreams of service, and I for one am most hopeful for all they are and will be doing.

As for the rest of us somewhere in the middle, it truly is our chance. Every day moves us toward our 50th anniversary. It is my hope we will have folks feel toward us what was shown that wonderful day we celebrated these lawyers’ careers.

Listed on the previous page are some comments from these lawyers I thought you might find interesting—great food for thought.

One very evident change in our profession from 1955 is that, of the lawyers honored, only one of 50 was a woman. Maybe the greatest symbol of change in it all was Nancy Diehl, President of the State Bar of Michigan, being the one to warmly give thanks to her for her service.

Life truly is about change—lots of it for the better!

\*A complete list of the 2005 50-year honorees was printed on page 42 of the March 2005 issue of the *Michigan Bar Journal*. ◆

### Share your thoughts/concerns

Please forward comments to  
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