



PBA President
Gretchen A. Mundorff

‘Tell Them What’s in Your Heart’

I wish I had paid more attention. I kept turning that thought over in my mind as I prepared to write my first “Side Bar” column. With all due respect to you former PBA presidents, I wish I had paid more attention to what you wrote in your first columns for *The Pennsylvania Lawyer*. I also thought about what advice my late mother, Kitty, would be giving me now if she were here with me in person. As I thought about my mother, I could almost hear her voice saying, “Gretchen, tell them what’s in your heart.”

Well, my heart is full. My heart is full of wonderful memories made and shared with so many of you over the course of the past 26 years as we’ve worked together and played together in the name of the PBA. I recall our young lawyer days when we grew up together in the PBA attending Young Lawyers Division meetings and functions. You know, all those times when we would engage in spirited debate at the YLD meetings and at times be vociferous in our arguments regarding certain points or issues about which we felt strongly. Then, in the evening, we would pass the hat to convince the DJ or band to stay just one more hour so we could go on dancing until the soles of our feet felt like they were on fire.

My heart is full with the recollection of the day the late Ted Stellwag, then PBA executive director, visited with me in my Connellsville office when I was chair of the YLD and spoke in hushed, almost poetic terms of how my life was going to be irrevocably changed by having joined what he called “the PBA family.” At the time I didn’t have a true sense of all that Ted was saying, but I have since developed a deep appreciation for the breadth and depth, the enormity of feeling his words embraced.

I remember, too, the many Board of Governors and House of Delegates meetings during which many of you spoke passionately on issues of great import not only to lawyers but to the people we serve, our clients and the residents of Pennsylvania. I am remembering how much I came to enjoy the debate in the House meetings and the healthy respect I came to have for those whose perspectives on various issues were different from mine.

And who of us can forget or for that matter wants to forget all the fun we have had and the tales we have told about the adventures and misadventures of PBA travel!

So my heart is full of 26 years of PBA past.

But my heart is also full of what I envision to be the future of the PBA. I see so many possibilities, so much potential for this bar association to make a difference in the lives of the residents of Pennsylvania. I have heard it said often recently that this is a bad time to be a lawyer, that a downturn in the economy is a bad thing for lawyers. But I think it is a time of great opportunity for us lawyers to harness our collective knowledge and skill sets to make life better for people. One way to do that as a group of lawyers, as the organized bar, is to do more pro bono work in the coming year. The PBA Board of Governors took a pledge some years ago that every board member would engage in at least one new pro bono case every year and would certify that by a written statement at the conclusion of each year. I have already put out a call to the members of the House of Delegates to follow suit, and I will be asking each county bar association to institute the same type of pro bono certification initiative in each of the 67 counties across Pennsylvania.

I see so many possibilities, so much potential for this bar association to make a difference in the lives of the residents of Pennsylvania.

My heart is full with the potential of having a truly diverse leadership that mirrors the PBA’s diverse membership. This is why we are putting together a Diversity Task Force to examine ways to accomplish this vitally important goal.

I believe we have a unique opportunity as lawyers to make our voices heard on Capitol Hill in Harrisburg regarding the need for mandatory civics education in all Pennsylvania public schools. ... And I can't think of a better group of people than all of you in the PBA to bring this civics-in-the-classroom initiative to fruition.

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The time has never been more critical to increase our efforts to provide pro bono legal services to the poor and underserved of our commonwealth. With the downturn in the economy, we are facing a decrease in both federal and state funding for legal services and a decrease in the funds generated by our IOLTA accounts as a result of low interest rates. Yet the downturn in the economy increases the need for legal services as the number of mortgage foreclosures and domestic violence cases increases. So my heart is full with the need for all of us to embrace this opportunity to demonstrate that we are an organization of lawyers with big hearts.

My heart is also full with the potential and possibilities that exist when we come together as an organized bar to help mentor our young lawyers and to help them make the transition to becoming bar leaders. This is why I have created a mentoring initiative coupled with a Bar Leadership Institute program. The kick-off for both of these programs will be at the PBA YLD Summer Meeting/New Admittee Conference July 30-Aug. 1 at Seven Springs.

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My heart is also full with concern about the lack of appropriate civics education for the children in Pennsylvania's classrooms. A recent survey led to an

astounding and, in my estimation, unacceptable finding that we are graduating a high percentage of high school seniors who cannot name the three branches of government. I believe we have a unique opportunity as lawyers to make our voices heard on Capitol Hill in Harrisburg regarding the need for mandatory civics education in all Pennsylvania public schools. Because I know in my heart that when people understand how their government is structured and how it functions, when they see the critical part the legal system plays in their society and in their lives and when they understand the import of the rule of law and how it sets our society apart from all others, then we will have a society that is knowledgeable about the role of lawyers in the legal system and shares a heartfelt respect for that system. And I can't think of a better group of people than all of you in the PBA to bring this civics-in-the-classroom initiative to fruition.

And so I'm back where I began this column, with my mother saying, "Gretchen, tell them what's in your heart." So I say to all of you, my PBA family, you are in my heart. ♦



Gretchen A. Mundorff
PBA President



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