



PBA President
Gretchen A. Mundorff

My Pappy's Garden

To say that my maternal grandfather, my "Pappy," had a flower garden would be to understate grossly the reality of the situation. In truth, my Pappy's flower gardens were quite magnificent and covered acres of a hillside known as Pechin Hill in the little village of Dunbar, Fayette County, Pa.

The intricate designs, patterns and plantings of my Pappy's gardens might well have been the work of one who held advanced degrees in horticulture and landscape architecture. My Pappy, however, was afforded only an eighth-grade education and labored in the local brickyard to sustain his family. His passion for the beauty of his flowers, for working the earth and creating his own private paradise, his sanctuary, if you will, on Pechin Hill seemed entirely normal to me as a small child. It was only in my adult life that I realized he was extraordinarily gifted.

As a little girl, I loved to take his hand as he led me through his gardens explaining the flower types and how one could create various designs and patterns by planting according to the height, size and color of the flowers. He planted all of the usual old-fashioned flowers, such as peonies, sweet william, irises ("flags"), snapdragons, gladiolas and clematis ("creepers"). He also grew some more exotic varieties, and I came to learn their names, such as blue delphinium, scarlet sage, ageratum, ranunculus and dendrobium orchids. He was a cornucopia of knowledge about flowers and gardens. Every winter he pored over seed catalogs, studied many books and articles regarding flowers and sketched diagrams of the gardens he would plant in the early spring. And so he set about the task of teaching his young granddaughter about flowers and gardening, instilling a passion in me,

a love for the beauty of flowers and gardens. He patiently answered my litany of questions while showing me and teaching me how to work the earth to produce such beauty. He was a master gardener.

It wasn't until much later that I realized that my Pappy was one of my earliest mentors. He was the most perfect of early mentors because he was nonjudgmental and patient in his explanations to me. He took great delight in my interest in the subject matter. He created a safe place for me to learn and explore and to tap into his vast knowledge about flowers and gardening. And when I think about the various mentors whom I have had in my life thus far — other family members, teachers, college and law school professors, lawyers, members and past presidents of the PBA — I realize that these people all have something in common with my Pappy. They all created a safe place for me to learn and be mentored. They all gave of their time and special knowledge to help me learn and grow. They all enhanced the quality of my life through their mentoring.

We have all had mentors in our lives. I am sure that if each of you stops for a moment to think about those who have mentored you, you will conclude that your mentors have made a difference in your life. Simply put, mentoring matters. This is why we have put into place the mentoring program of the PBA. We have paired young admittees with more "seasoned" lawyers who live in close proximity to one another. Because it is important that our young lawyers have a safe place where they can be mentored by nonjudgmental, patient lawyers whose fulfillment is in sharing their knowledge, their special skill set in the law, with a young lawyer and instilling in that young lawyer a desire to become the very best lawyer he or she can be.

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Young lawyers are the future of our profession. They are the future of the PBA.

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I have been thinking a lot lately about my lawyer mentors. As a young lawyer, I had the good fortune to work for a PBA past president, the late Ira Coldren, who was certainly one of my greatest mentors in the PBA. I worked with Mr. Coldren when he was PBA president, and my involvement with the PBA Young Lawyers Division really started as a result of a handwritten memo he placed in my mailbox at his firm, “urging” me to attend a YLD summer conference held at Toftrees. I attended that conference, and I became hooked on the YLD. As we say in the PBA, “the rest is history.”

When I think about my mentors as a young lawyer, I always think of Bernard John. Mr. John was a well-respected and seasoned Uniontown lawyer, the father of Simon and Anne John, both of whom followed in their father’s footsteps as lawyers. Anne is currently serving as the Zone 6 governor on the PBA Board of Governors. Bernard John was my safe place as a young lawyer. When Mr. Coldren would give me an assignment and I was at a loss to know even how to begin the task (I was clueless.), I would call Mr. John. He would stay on the phone with me, patiently explaining things until he was sure that I got it and I would be able to complete the task at hand.

At times, Mr. John would have me come to his office because, as he said over the phone, “Gretchen, it will be easier if I show you.” He created a safe place for me where I didn’t feel judged. He never criticized and seemed to be delighted when I would finally catch on after much patient explanation from him. Mr. John never told anyone about our phone calls or meetings, not even Simon or Anne, and certainly not Mr. Coldren. His satisfaction came in knowing that he was helping a young lawyer transition from being clueless to being confident.

And so I urge you, spend some time mentoring a young lawyer. They are the future of our profession. They are the future of the PBA. Your satisfaction will be in watching them grow in their knowledge and practice of law, much like the beautiful flowers of my Pappy’s garden. Together, by mentoring our young lawyers, we can cultivate their young minds and watch as our garden blooms and grows. ♦



Gretchen A. Mundorff
PBA President

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