

MESSAGE

PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

Nov 6, 2007

A day in the life

I am guessing that the morning routine of the practicing lawyer, with a few variations, is a pretty familiar scene. Oh, some of you probably drag yourself out of bed a bit earlier in order to do a few minutes on the Stair-Master before breakfast. But the rest of us roll out ready to read the Star, which nowadays can be done pretty quickly, as we wolf down some cereal before a shower and off to the races. In between snip-pets of news – or the dreaded telethon – on NPR, the plan for the work day begins to develop in the pre-conscious part of the brain.

We start wondering if traffic will run smoothly, so as to be at the desk by the self-appointed hour. The day's meetings or court appearances take shape in the back of the mind, or we play over how to best reprimand a staff member for a job done poorly that was discovered at 9:00 a.m. the evening before when checking e-mail yet another time. Not a minute to be wasted, you know.

I never figured Ward Cleaver for a lawyer. His morning routine was far too leisurely. He perched in the chair of *petit fourilles*, munching on the bacon and eggs served by the ever attentive June. Dressed for a cocktail party at the breakfast table, June freshened up his coffee so Ward would not be disturbed as he read the paper, when not passing on fatherly words of wisdom to his sons, Wally and Beaver. Then Wally's buddy, Eddie Haskell, would drop by, offer a "my, Mrs. Cleaver, you look nice this morning," and the boys were off to school. Ward would give June a 1960s television peck on the cheek and wander off to work, seemingly without a care in the world.¹

Unlike the carefree Ward Cleaver, our professional lives present some daily challenges. A fire here, an emergency there, and next thing you know it's time to head home. Most days, life as a lawyer is pretty good. Even a "bad day," upon reflection was probably not all that bad. Criminal defense lawyers that adhere to the motto, "if someone goes to jail, it should be the client," can usually find someone in the courtroom who had a really bad day. If a business deal blows up, there maybe some unhappy people, but they are all going home that night. Try as one might, sometimes a big verdict goes against a client. But, in fact, it is the client's case, not the lawyer's.

It is hard to imagine waking up to find that overnight the government closed the courts, the gate at the Chief Justice's house had been locked with him inside, and the television stations and newspapers shut down. Then, to go downtown and find the police all decked out and ready to do battle with – a bunch of lawyers. Now that is a bad day, not only for lawyers and judges, but for the rule of law.

Our fellow lawyers in Pakistan have quickly taken to the streets. Not a passive group whatsoever; by some accounts last week, some 1,500 lawyers had been arrested. The photos and news clips from Islamabad show them being beaten and kicked. In one clip, four men hoisted one attorney, carrying him off to an awaiting police bus. These lawyers, trained to use written and verbal skills to make a point, were taken by armed men as they protested President Musharraf's "Proclamation of Emergency," by which the constitution has been held in abeyance. He cited Abraham Lincoln suspending *habeas corpus* during the Civil War in defense of this decree.

There is much camaraderie among lawyers. We stand together as we defend our breed when the butt of jokes at dinners throughout the year. Here in America, our fellowship and common bond is usually evidenced in social settings, such as the Inn of Court, Lawyers' Club or an IBA luncheon. We do not gather in large numbers to protest, nor do we generally speak in one voice against a government agency or a legislative mandate. I would like to think that it is not because we would not, but because we need not.

There is much disagreement right now over state of the rule of law in our own country. There are extreme views on both sides of the political spectrum. Nonetheless, they continue to be debated in courts of law and not by lawyers facing off in the streets or shouting from behind the wire mesh of a police bus on the evening news. As is often observed, our system may not be perfect, but it does seem to work.

No matter what disaster ambushed you in the halls of your office, there are some fellow lawyers a half a world away that really had a bad day. Hopefully your personal versions of Wally and the Beaver will turn up at the dinner table to share their day – and in the process make yours.*



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¹ For those not of a certain age, or who've never watched *Nick at Night*, "Leave It to Beaver" was a television show that ran from 1958 to 1963. Dad read the evening paper wearing a tie and a cardigan, Mom always a dress, and their best escapades were always resolved with some sound fatherly advice. I can hear the carpool laughter.