

Winter 2008

Legal Lore

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Recommended Citation

Moran, M.J., Legal Lore, *The Paralegal Educator*, Winter 2008, Volume 21, Number 3 (pp. 31-32).

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Legal Lore

Marissa J. Moran, New York City College of Technology

We are lonesome animals. We spend all our life trying to be less lonesome. One of our ancient methods is to tell a story begging the listener to say—and to feel—“Yes, that’s the way it is, or at least that’s the way I feel it. You’re not as alone as you thought.”¹

All sorrows can be borne if you put them into a story or tell a story about them.²

There is a certain embarrassment about being a storyteller in these times when stories are considered not quite as satisfying as statements and statements not quite as satisfying as statistics; but in the long run, a people is known, not by its statements or its statistics, but by the stories it tells.³

Radio put technology into storytelling and made it sick. TV killed it. Then you were locked into somebody else’s sighting of that story. You no longer had the benefit of making that picture for yourself,

using your imagination. Storytelling brings back that humanness that we have lost with TV. You talk to children and they don’t hear you. They are television addicts. Mamas bring them home from the hospital and drag them up in front of the set and the great stare-out begins.⁴

The first law of story-telling... Every man is bound to leave a story better than he found it.⁵

Those who undertake the study and later the practice of law do so for a variety of reasons. Many students of law believe that the time and effort spent studying will lead to lucrative employment in the future. Others have been duly inspired by an attorney they heard speak at a high school career day event. Some have recollected how a family member laughingly said to them as a child that they would make a good attorney due to their questioning skills (asking “why” all the time)



and their fierce determination to get to the truth. Some have admired the attorney work ethic and perhaps even rooted for the “hero” attorney portrayed in a movie. Courtroom doors have literally been thrown open by virtue of television. Legal proceedings and the routine work of a judge have garnered much interest in the law and how it affects our everyday lives. During the course of my years in practice as well as my years as a professor of law, there has been one overwhelming reason given by those whose lives I’ve touched and been touched by. It is simply because of a genuine desire to assist people and the sustained belief that the law can undo the

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Conference *Continued from page 30*

- 10/03/2008 to 05/17/2009; **Tutankhamen and the Golden Age of the Pharaohs**; Dallas Museum of Art; Tutankhamen and the Golden Age of the Pharaohs offers glimpses of that evolving period. On display are fifty of Tutankhamen’s burial objects, including his royal diadem — the gold crown discovered encircling the head of his mummified body that he likely wore as king — and one of the gold and precious stone

inlaid canopic coffinettes that contained his mummified internal organs. 214-922-1200

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Even though we have just left all of you, the National Conference Committee has been quite busy. Stay tuned — we’ll have more to

report in the coming months! For now, why not mark your calendars and plan for a trip to Dallas in October? AAfPE needs you! ■

Kathryn L. Myers is an Associate Professor and the Coordinator of Paralegal Studies at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods College. She has been involved in paralegal education since 1982. She has been active in the American Association for Paralegal Educators since 1989, and was President 2000-2001.

Legal Lore *Continued*

wrongs or harms suffered by some of the weakest people in society. Thus, good can conquer evil.

Often, the words of a friend or particular saying sustains us during a troubled time or inspires us to continue on even when nothing seems to be going right for us, or others' belief in us has faltered, or even still, our belief in ourselves has reached its limit. Although libraries are replete with self-help and motivational books, the approach of real life stories of people in certain professions or at certain times in their lives — teacher, college student, Americans after September 11, 2001, mother, son, daughter, father — say it best. *The Chicken Soup* book series uses a storytelling format to convey messages that others may relate to or be inspired by. This is because everyone has a story to tell that allows us to connect with them on some level, even if the story is told to us by someone who leads a different life than we do. With the notion of why a student first chooses to study law and later continues to pursue it as a career despite financial and emotional obstacles, and the concept of learning through storytelling, the idea for a legal writing assignment was born. Who or what motivates the City Tech Legal Studies students or inspires them to continue on and keep reaching for their goals?

Legal studies students as well as students from other disciplines in

my Constitutional Law class wrote about the unique obstacles they've encountered in pursuit of a college degree. Students began their writing piece with a quote or saying that correlated to the substance and meaning of their stories. Prompted by a creative twist on the well known mantra from *Law & Order*,

In The Department of Law And Paralegal Studies, the dedicated professors create assignments to assist their dedicated students in developing skills in two separate but equally important areas of concentration: Law and Writing.

These are their stories....

the students eagerly embarked on their story-writing assignment. Their stories encourage the reader to connect with the writers who have a common goal in mind, but have approached this goal from quite diverse paths.

Long before I wrote stories, I listened for stories. Listening for them is something more acute than listening to them. I suppose it's an early form of participation in what goes on. Listening children know stories are there.

*When their elders sit and begin, children are just waiting and hoping for one to come out, like a mouse from its hole.*⁶

Everyone has a story to tell, we just need to listen for them and be inspired. ■

- ¹ John Steinbeck (1902–1968), U.S. author. repr. In *Writers at Work* Fourth Series, ed. George Plimpton (1977). "In Awe of Words," The Exonian, 75th anniversary edition, Exeter University.
- ² Isak Dinesen (1885–1962), Danish author. As quoted in "The Human Condition," *Epigram*, ch. 5, by Hannah Arendt (1958).
- ³ Flannery O'Connor (1925–1964), U.S. fiction writer and essayist. *Mystery and Manners*, part 5 (1969). Written in 1963.
- ⁴ Jackie Torrence (b. 1944), African American storyteller. As quoted in *I Dream a World*, by Brian Lanker (1989). Torrence was a professional storyteller specializing in "ghost stories, African-American tales, and Appalachian mountain lore."
- ⁵ Humphrey, Mrs. Ward (1851–1920), British novelist. Dr. Baker, in *Robert Elsmere*, bk. 1, ch. 3 (1888). Full name is Mary Augusta Ward.
- ⁶ Eudora Welty (b. 1909), U.S. fiction writer. *One Writer's Beginnings*, ch. 1 (1984).

Marissa J. Moran is an associate professor at New York City College of Technology ("City Tech") in the Department of Law and Paralegal Studies. After graduating from law school, she clerked for the chief Federal Bankruptcy Judge in the Southern District of New York and later worked as an associate in the New York law firms Kaye, Scholer, Fierman, Hays & Handler and Emmet, Marvin & Martin. Marissa has served as chair of the Legislative Committee of City Tech's governance body, chair of the Faculty-Student Disciplinary Committee, and has been a guest speaker and organizer of City Tech conferences co-sponsored with the Brooklyn DA's Office. She has three sons, James, JonPaul and Justin.