



## **The Law and Other Things**

The Thirty Fifth Anniversary of the  
Young Lawyers Section of the  
Chicago Bar Association

by  
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### **I. Introduction**

This organization began thirty-five years ago as the largest organization of young lawyers of any city in America. Since then we have grown from 3,500 young lawyers to 10,000, and have won more American Bar Association awards for excellence than any of our peers. At the same time we created a wealth of enjoyable experiences that will last each of us a lifetime.

On a prior occasion I spoke of the great lawyers who populated our early years. Tom Hayward, in many ways our co-founder, Tom Howell, one of the original "Four H's", Jack Jiganti, Dorothy Kirie Kinnaird, Presiding Judge of the Chancery Division of our Circuit Court, John Powers Crowley our greatly missed U.S. District Court Judge, and Laurel Bellows, Chair of the American Bar Association's House of Delegates, among many others. It is a simple truth that the people you meet here will prove to be one of the richest rewards of your legal career.

### **II. The Way We Were**

Thirty five years ago, as now, one of the purposes of our organization was to open some windows from the law to other things. We wanted to give young lawyers and the values they embody a rational institution; one within which to establish a relationship between legal thought and thought about the public interest and legal subjects other than the law we practiced every day.

At our law schools student organizations are devoted to a broad range of legal inquiry, community outreach and practice areas which enable students to demonstrate the validity of their moral and social values. Likewise, the very courses and seminars offered by these law schools, on juvenile justice, affordable housing and other societal needs are mostly in response to student demand.

But then one graduates.

The problem is that many of our law firms and law departments act like legal monasteries. The word "monastery" comes from the Greek word for a hermit's cell. Our colleges, law schools and experiences in life did not train us for a hermit's cell. Yet our legal structures increasingly stifle rational inquiry by relentlessly focusing on the clients' legal needs of the moment.

As a result, at most law firms and law departments the needs of the community and profession are short changed. Collegiality is defined as drinks with your fellow associates after work, preferably after 10:00 p.m.! Law firms have pro bono and other educational activities, but these activities are often on-site and cloistered. Little opportunity is provided for the hands-on experience in life that makes for great leaders in our judiciary, our law firms and law departments, and our community.

The task is not to choose between two disciplines, but to live in both. It is well to remember Tennessee Williams' aphorism: "Caged birds accept each other, but flight is what they long for."

Our organization is built to meet this basic human need, but what has kept it strong these thirty five years?

### **III. A Commitment to Rationalness**

The Young Lawyers Section was founded by people concerned with the problem of method. Work on creation of the new structure began when four planning committees were formed to draft our bylaws, develop a committee system, plan a membership campaign, and initiate a strong relationship with the American Bar Association.

From the outset, we sought to be innovative:

- There were to be no glass ceilings in our leadership or involvement, with the result that women and minorities have provided our greatest strength over the years. Today, by way of example, we congratulate Carolyn D. Amadon on her spectacular year as our Chair and welcome Megan Healy McClung as she takes up the reins of leadership for the coming year.
- We introduced a full schedule of breakfast meetings for most committees as a way to get our projects accomplished while the senior partners at our firms were still riding the train to the office. It was the first organized program of Power Breakfasts in Chicago, and, in retrospect, a backward step for civilization!

- An innovation of those early years was the concept that our committees should generally engage in "project" activities with tangible, feasible and finite goals. The notion was to avoid amorphous or long term activities which we felt would not sustain committee interest.
- But our principal task was to find a rationale for this new institution. The rationale we discovered was our profound openness to ideas. We wanted to solve problems by creating a haven for projects and programs to deal with them. Ideas, welcomed in college and law school, were pent up by the structures of legal practice with no way to implement them.

It was in solving these basic human needs that our organization began and remains unique and strong.

Over the years our "project" approach has led us to spin-off programs which began as projects. These spin-offs remain today as some of the most important organizations and services in Chicago and have served as models for similar programs nationwide:

- We initiated the Pro Se Court, and created an indispensable Pro Se Litigant's Handbook to teach citizens in our community how to use this new kind of court effectively. Both have become crown jewels of the Circuit Court of Cook County.
- We spun-off Lawyers for the Creative Arts to provide free legal services to artists and cultural organizations to help them feel at home in Chicago.
- The Legal Clinic at DePaul Law School began as a radical new Section project for the delivery of legal services not to the poor, but to lower middle income persons who were not served by any other legal assistance program.
- We established Neighborhood Justice, Chicago's first public mediation service, which has become an indispensable resource for our Circuit Court; and is now called the Center for Conflict Resolution.

The twenty committees we formed when we began reflect our range of ideas:

- We created a unique "Law Explorers" program for young men and women between the ages of 14 and 20 who are interested in careers in law and government. Today, volunteer attorneys meet with students from 100 Chicago area high schools every other Wednesday evening and participate in role playing concerning legal and ethical questions. The Law Explorers participate at the end of each year in a mock trial competition.
- Law Day was expanded to Law Week and celebrated throughout the City and in its high schools. To cover the rest of the year we launched a series of nationwide radio broadcasts to educate the public and teenagers on civil and criminal "street law" issues in their communities.

- A much needed Chicago Directory of Agencies and Services for Consumer Complaint and Redress was published.
- A unique legislative program was begun to assist the Cook County Board and Chicago City Council in researching rules and ordinances and eliminating antiquated laws, such as various laws of the horse, laws which still existed on the books thirty five years ago despite the prevalence of the horseless carriage!
- Juvenile court, victimless crime and corrections reform projects were begun such as our 431 page Illinois Criminal Justice Compliance Study, and our award winning Volunteer in Parole program to help those on parole return to society.
- We established an architecture and the law committee, a prisoner art shop, and Mid-America Ballet and Creative City (now Creative Arts) committees.
- Lastly, we launched a "Para-Professionals" project to train those then new-fangled employees that are now indispensable and called "Paralegals."

#### **IV. The Future**

The Young Lawyers Section has been home to the best and the brightest lawyers in our City. It has produced federal and state court judges, Chicago Bar Association presidents, national leaders and many of the leading lawyers in our most important law firms and corporations.

The great task before us is to build on this great tradition. To evolve and open windows to other things. To search out ideas and provide the means to test them in the real world. This is our mission and our method.

I congratulate you on your great voyage. You will always treasure the friendships and experiences you have here.