

IMAGINING A GREAT MULTI-DISCIPLINARY PRACTICE

By Merrilyn Astin Tarlton, Class of 1996

What happens when you challenge the best minds in the field to imagine a multidisciplinary practice of law? We found out in Denver during the COLPM Annual Induction Weekend on September 24 and 25. And it was pretty darn interesting!

Launched at a lovely mountain-vista-viewing reception hosted by Holland & Hart's Fellows, Warren Tomlinson, Ron Martin and (new Fellow) John Tredennick in their firm's 32nd Floor conference facility, the weekend got off to a collegial start. Nearly 47 Fellows and spouses then moved to "Lodo" to take advantage of a rollicking but unofficial Friday night dinner at Denver's new *Cook Street School of Fine Cooking*. The event was organized by Fellows Gordie Jacobs and Charlie Robinson with some assistance from John Tredennick, whose wife, Page, is a member of the school's ownership group.

Saturday morning brought the meat of the program. Facilitated by Peter J. Neary, a group of 65 Fellows spent the morning focused on the human side of impending change in the legal profession. Using the simple *Change Style Indicator* to help participants identify their own preferences for dealing with, creating and responding to change, Dr. Neary invited the group to explore possibilities inherent in the creation of multidisciplinary practices.

Divided into small groups by preference, (It will come as no surprise to anyone that this group of pioneers generally exhibited a strong innate preference for *origination* while the profession in general tends toward the *conservator* end of the spectrum.) participants were invited to

create a picture of the most interesting expression of a multidisciplinary practice they could imagine. The versions were numerous, but the similarities were striking. No one in the room seemed to question the inevitability of lawyers in practice with other professionals. All explored the opportunities from the vantage of client needs.

Examples ranged from an elder client-focused organization providing legal, financial, dietary, psychological and housing assistance to simple law firms augmented by the addition of an accountant.

In the afternoon, a panel of experts and observers shared their perspectives on the future of the multidisciplinary practice. Fellows David Andrews, Ward Bower, Leary Davis, Charlie Robinson and Michael Simmons were joined by Sherwin Simmons, Chair of the ABA Commission on Multi-disciplinary Practice and Randy Lewis, Managing Partner of Hildebrandt, Inc.

Feedback from participating Fellows at the end of the weekend indicated continued enthusiasm for this, the second of COLPM programs organized by J. Harris Morgan to increase Fellow interaction and participation. As we knew all along, COLPM Fellows like to be involved in the discussion!

The Induction Dinner was a glittery affair in the Moulin Rouge room of Denver's Downtown Hyatt Regency. Seventeen new Fellows were inducted (see list on page four and the COLPM presidential gavel was passed from Bob Greene to Lowell Rothschild.

In all a successful — and mind-expanding — weekend!

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confused by two words, both of which were very new to my vocabulary — "acolyte" and "astronaut"! My dreams of space travel were dashed! Life as I had wanted to know it was over!



And it must have been at that very moment I concluded that I should never again be tricked by the meaning of words. So I decided to become a lawyer!

I am a native Oklahoma Cityan graduating from the University of Oklahoma with a B.A. in Political Science and Philosophy in 1971 and a Juris Doctor from Oklahoma City University in 1974. Since Texas has such beautiful girls, I did poach out in West Texas and married one of the best. Sherry is from Post. Everyone knows where that is.

Beginning in the summer after my sophomore year in college, I started an electronics company named "Medi-Call" which I operated, sometimes part-time and sometimes full-time, until I hung up a shingle right out of law school. I attended law school at night. The last year and a half of law school I worked for the Oklahoma Attorney General's Office during the day and had an additional part-time job at night, after class, as a bookkeeper in a doctor's office.

I took the bar exam in February, 1974, graduated in May, 1974, and began a solo practice in June, 1974. My practice is general, with an emphasis on family law, estate planning and probate, personal injury, banking law, and small business representation. I received Certification as a Certified Financial Planner in 1993, in order to increase my knowledge and skills as a lawyer, but I don't practice financial planning.

After opening my practice and experiencing the first symptoms of malnutrition, I began teaching business

law at night at Rose State College. In September, 1975, I was asked if I would like to be the first Director of the new Legal Assistant Program. After being assured I could

continue to practice law full-time and that I would be paid for my services, I set out to find out what a Legal Assistant was and then accepted the position.

My responsibilities included program, course, and materials development in addition to teaching an average of fifteen credit hours per semester. I believe that Rose State (then Oscar Rose Junior College) was the first junior college in the country to receive full ABA accreditation which was received in August 1976. I continued developing the program and teaching until 1981.

I have always been quite active in the organized bar, at the national and local levels: the ABA (one of seven lawyers who formed in 1980 what came to be known as the Computer Division of the Law Practice Management Section), the Oklahoma County Bar Association (President, 1994-1995), and the Oklahoma State Bar (President, 2000).

I've served as Municipal Judge for the City of Midwest City and as Judge on the Temporary Court of Civil Appeals. I am a regular guest columnist on the "Legal Beat" for the Journal record which is Oklahoma City's daily business and legal newspaper.

I used to teach Sunday School and was Youth Director at my church, but gave that up when one of my star students opted to change religions. For fun and games, I scuba dive, play tennis, water and snow ski, and ride a Harley-Davidson. I used to fly planes and sail

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