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DO YOU REMEMBER?

Fall is here! It's my favorite time of the year. The weather is cooler, the colors are beginning to show in the mountains, and it's football time in Tennessee. I look forward to fall each year, and especially to October, the month where fall activities are underway, but the holidays are far enough in the future that I look forward to them without yet planning, scheduling, and (yes, sometimes) stressing about the busy-ness they bring to the last part of each year. In October, I soak up the season and all that comes with it, and each year it is fresh, crisp, and new.

October also brings us bar results and newly minted lawyers. Though the exam has changed over the years in content, format, and manner of delivery, and the results come sooner now thanks to advances in technology, for me one of the most exciting parts of each October is welcoming those new admittees to our profession and to our bar. Each year, I think back to my own experiences and the pride I felt upon joining this profession. Do you remember that feeling of waiting for your bar exam results? I sure do.

Some of you may know that I went to law school and was first admitted to practice in Virginia. At that time, every bar applicant traveled to a single location in July to sit for the 2-day Virginia Bar Examination, where the dress code for participation in the exam was courtroom attire: a suit or coat and tie for men, a dress or skirt and blazer for women. (Note: Virginia maintains this process, including the dress code, for exam-takers today.) The summer that I graduated from law school, a law school classmate and I made the 4-hour drive to the exam location together, and we shared a hotel room for the duration of the test. She and I both felt good about our performance overall, but we couldn't be sure—you never really know—so I anxiously anticipated my results. I had started my first full-time legal position immediately after taking the July bar, taken a week off to get married and go on a honeymoon with Bill, and was diving in to learning all the many things new lawyers need to know despite having just spent three years in law school. Of course, at that time, bar results were received by good, old-fashioned U.S. mail. And, because the exam was in part in essay format, which was manually graded, it also took a bit longer for results to be ready. I don't think there's ever been a more anticipated and at the same time dreaded moment of my life—all those months of studying and weeks of waiting to find out whether the last three years of effort would prove worthy.

The Board of Bar Examiners typically released July bar exam results in early November. So, starting about November 1, each evening upon arriving home from work I checked our mailbox with equal parts unease and excitement. In addition to providing applicants their bar results by letter, they were also posted publicly at the Court, in Richmond, and each fall, the Richmond Times-Dispatch—the state's largest paper by circulation—would dedicate a full page of the issue immediately following the release of the bar results to listing by full name those who succeeded in passing the test for all the world to see. Cautiously optimistic, I

awaited my letter's arrival, fully aware that my parents and many family friends would also be checking their copy of the Times-Dispatch for the results. However unbeknownst to me, my husband, Bill, knowing that his new bride would not rest easy until the results were in hand, took it upon himself to ease my mind. In early November of that year, he began calling the Times-Dispatch daily, and on the day the bar results were released, he spoke to an employee of the paper who kindly took the time to confirm that my name was among the listing of those who had passed. He then left work early to meet me at my office and broke the good news to me. Soon afterward, my formal notification arrived. Then began the process of becoming a "real" lawyer: being sworn in, introductions to judges, court clerks and lawyers, and seeing my name added to the firm's letterhead. I was proud, and humbled—as I had already realized I had a lot still to learn. I looked up to the lawyers and judges in my community, as did those around me. I still recall thoughtful and subtle lessons I received from lawyers in my firm and other members of the bar, even, on some occasions, from opposing counsel. These moments of mentoring reinforced my conviction that I had joined an honorable profession with serious duties of competency, responsibility, and integrity.

Can you remember your season of waiting for bar results? Do you still recall your early experiences as a new lawyer? This rite of passage is one I suspect each of us recollects well, and it, like many other aspects of our profession, is one of many experiences that helps to bond each of us with those lawyers who came before us and those who join the bar after us.

I consider myself fortunate to practice law in this community among lawyers with the high levels of professionalism and congeniality we enjoy here in Knoxville. I know I am not alone in this sentiment—the Knoxville bar wears its reputation for reflecting both qualities proudly. As we welcome newly admitted lawyers into our community this fall, let's indoctrinate them, not just into Tennessee football and the other rituals of fall in the Smokies, but also into the traditions of our chosen profession and the character that makes our bar unique. Give a warm welcome to the new lawyers you encounter at the courthouse and in meetings. Let's encourage them to become engaged in our community by bringing them along to a Barristers' event or a KBA committee meeting (in person or virtually) and look for opportunities to pay forward the mentoring and congenial professionalism the Knoxville legal community is known for across Tennessee. Doing so, we help the newest among us to feel a part of this thing that is bigger than each of us, reaffirming their decision to pursue a career in the law. An easy place to start is by registering to attend the KBA's New Admittees Reception on Tuesday, October 19th at the Square Room and checking the KBA's website (www.knoxbar.org) for other opportunities to serve, learn and socialize with the newest members of our legal community. We are carefully considering all efforts to make in-person gatherings safe for our members. I hope to see you there!

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