

VOICE OF EXPERIENCE



a monthly e-newsletter for
experienced lawyers and their families

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Lawyer Voices From Maine and San Francisco

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By Jeff Tolman

Jeff Tolman is an attorney in Poulsbo, Washington.

While serving on the ABA House of Delegates I learned a lot about the similarity and dissimilarity of attorneys from different practice locations, firm sizes and practice areas.



For eight years I had the good fortune to be a member of the ABA House of Delegates. What I learned was the similarity and dissimilarity of different practice locations, firm sizes and practice areas. I wanted to start this column with two people who on the surface have little in common aside from being lawyers: Helen Hall, a legal services lawyer in Maine, and John Feeney, a civil defense lawyer in San Francisco. Their stories follow.

Helen Hall

I met Helen Hall in the 1990s when she was working as a paralegal for a local law firm, after a career managing restaurants. In 2003 Helen decided she wanted to join the profession, so quit her job and went to the University of Idaho Law School, graduating in 2006. After a year as a VISTA volunteer, Helen's professional journey took her to Maine to be close to much of her family in 2007, joining Pine Tree Legal Assistance, Maine's largest provider of legal services, where she worked in the Bangor office. Initially Helen she was a general practitioner, handling landlord-tenant and Social Security disability matters among her caseload. The past six years Helen's practice primarily has involved tax matters against the IRS. Having grown up in a family where her father chauffeured for wealthy Maine residents in the summer and then lived hand-to-mouth during Maine's winters, Helen is well aware of the hurdles facing many of her clients.

Editorial Purpose

The Voice of Experience is the newsletter of the ABA Senior Lawyers Division, distributed electronically to all SLD members. Membership in the division is free to dues-paying ABA members who are age 62 and older. *VOE* offers articles on elder law, practice tips, Division news, program notes, and information on transitioning to Second Season of Service.

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What advice would she give someone thinking of becoming an attorney? Do it if you are passionate about it. Don't if you are seeking status or money.

Helen is very proud of the hundreds of thousands of dollars she has helped her clients negotiate with the IRS, which has given them necessary funds for food and shelter.

"Managing the stress" is a constant challenge for lawyers.

After eight years as a paralegal, I wondered how her life as a lawyer was different than she anticipated. "As an attorney you have the full responsibility in your cases" was her answer.

Would she take the same professional journey again? "Yes. For the most part our work is a great, human experience."

John Feeney



John Feeney's family has deep, notable roots in the San Francisco area, and in the heart of our nation's pastime. John's great-grandfather was Charles Stoneham, owner of the New York, then San Francisco, Giants. His father was Chub Feeney, President of the National League. John graduated from Dartmouth College (1974), then UC-Hastings

School of Law (1978). He is a certified specialist in legal malpractice, practicing with Murphy Pearson Bradley & Feeney. I met John at Bandon Dunes on an annual January golf trip to one of America's great links courses.

After taking the bar exam and backpacking until his money ran out, John joined the firm of Hunkler Murphy & Pearson as their fourth lawyer and first associate. The firm has grown to a 45-50-lawyer firm in San Francisco, Sacramento and Los Angeles defending clients in professional liability claims. John is very proud of the relationship he and his partners have sustained over the past 37 years of growth and change.

I immediately asked John what advice (as a legal malpractice defense counsel) he would give practitioners like me. He said "Communicate with clients and put it all in writing."

For years John was active in his firm's hiring committee. What does he look for in aspiring attorneys? Confidence and someone who is willing to work hard. Imagination doesn't hurt either, as John spoke of the young lawyer who was his first interview of the day because "I wanted to be first so everyone today will be compared to me." A wise young man...who became a member of John's firm.

John noted how electronic data retrieval - and the enormity of discovery materials now - have changed the nature and cost of litigation.

Would John recommend law school to his child? Yes. Law school is a wonderful education. It teaches a good way to think and analyze

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problems, and how society works, even if a student does not end up as a practicing lawyer.

John's advice to young lawyers? "The profession of law is one of the best occupations, something to be proud of. The business of law is very stressful and difficult. Unfortunately the craft of law is moving away from being the profession it once was. Lawyers are an important part of how our society functions properly. Always recognize the good things the law does. Always treat law as a profession."

Despite their apparent dissimilarities, both Helen and John are very proud of their profession and its place in society, and of the clients they have helped.

Tips from a senior lawyer:

"Don't take any case in which the client knows more lawyers than you do."

"A lawyer's goal should not be to be busy. A lawyer's goal should be to be busy and paid."