

THE HUMAN SIDE OF LEGAL WRITING: REMEMBERING OUR COLLEAGUES

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Thirty years. Where to begin?

When I look back, it's hard for me to believe that the Journal of the Legal Writing Institute was practically a “newborn” when I was also new to this growing field. And here it is, thirty years older ... as am I.

As a new “legal writing instructor,”¹ I remember being eager to get as much experience as I could in our field – to learn our subject, meet leaders in the field, keep my theoretical finger on the pulse of the career that I had begun in 1993. So, when the call for Associate Editors came out, I enthusiastically agreed to serve as an Associate Editor for Volumes 3 (1997) and 4 (1998). Through that experience, I had the opportunity to read the newly minted work of others more experienced than I, and at the same time, co-author a JLWI article on teaching international students—which became and still is one of my passions—with my mentor and friend, Mark Wojcik.²

After a taste of working on such a professional journal with like-minded teachers, I was honored to serve as Co-Editor-in-Chief of Volume 8 with my renowned Villanova colleague, well-established legal writing leader, friend, and boss Lou Sirico. In addition to having my Co-Editor-in-Chief down the hallway, it was great to work with Lou on matters other than what took place in the classroom. Some of our work was relatively easy: gathering Associate Editors to review and assist the ten-plus authors in polishing their articles on everything from structuring how we teach students and otherwise improving our courses to learning theory, writing for judges, and the difficult topic of depression and anxiety in

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¹ Happily, over the years, our titles at Villanova Law changed to Assistant/Associate/Professor of Legal Writing, and eventually to Assistant/Associate/Professor of Law.

² Mark E. Wojcik and Diane Penneys Edelman, *Overcoming Language and Legal Differences in the Global Classroom: Teaching Legal Research and Legal Writing to International Law Graduates and International Law Students*, 3 LEG. WRITING 127 (1997).

law students. It was through this aspect of our work that I got to know legal writing professionals outside of my home school, and worked with authors and editors alike. And so, working as an editor on the JWLI taught me a great deal about legal writing, and it taught me about the strength and compassion of this community as well.

What stands out the most in my memory of our work on the JLWI, however, is that Volume 8 begins with tributes to Tom Blackwell, our dear colleague at Appalachian School of Law in Grundy, Virginia. Along with his dean, L. Anthony Sutin, and a student, Angela Dales, Tom was killed by a former law student, who wounded three other students as well before being restrained. Appalachian at that time was only five years old, and was dedicated to “provid[ing] opportunity for people from Appalachia and beyond to realize their dreams of practicing law and bettering their communities,”³ and Tom was one of the dedicated professors who had an integral role in guiding ASL’s early classes toward that goal.

By the beginning of 2002, I had only recently gotten to know Tom and learned more about the mission of his school. When the news broke on January 16 that there had been a shooting at Appalachian, Lou and I ran to the television, hoping that the one person we knew there—Tom—had not been a victim.

But he was.

And so, what started for Lou and me as an intellectual endeavor became an emotionally more difficult task--namely, soliciting and editing “Going Home: Memories of Tom,” submitted by the late Molly Warner Lien, Tom’s former colleague at Chicago-Kent College of Law, as well as Clinton W. Shinn, his colleague at ASL.⁴ Anyone who reads those memorials of Tom will remember his kindness, warmth, and sense of humor—and those who didn’t know him will gain a beautiful and true picture of the kind soul that he was, and will be inspired by his work and his passion for his family, school, community . . . and Texas.

So, although I thought hard about what to write about in this commemorative essay, I chose the tributes to Tom Blackwell, again, as a symbol of the caring, close, and proud community of legal writing professionals that was proud to call Tom a colleague and friend. As we remember him every year when awarding the Thomas F. Blackwell Memorial

³ See <http://www.asl.edu/missionhistory/>.

⁴ 8 LEG. WRITING 1 (2002). Former ALWD President Pamela Lysaght performed the initial edits on Molly’s and Clinton’s essays, which together constitute the “Going Home” article.

Award for Outstanding Achievement in the Field of Legal Writing,⁵ let's remember the values that he exemplified and bring them into our classrooms, law schools, and communities.

You never know how work in our field, or work on the LWI Journal, may make a lasting impression on you.

⁵ See <https://www.lwionline.org/awards/the-blackwell-award>.