



# CHAIRPERSON'S MESSAGE

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For more than eight years, I have reserved the first Saturday of the month to attend Family Law Council meetings. I remember the first few meetings. I was in awe of the attorneys present whose names were familiar to me as the authors of my daily reference materials. I wanted to become active with this group, but I could not imagine what I had to offer these family law gurus. By volunteering my time, I found a way to serve the Section. As I conclude my year as Chair, I still sit in awe of the attorneys on Council. These are some of the finest men and women I know, both personally and professionally.

Fortunately, I am writing this column in the privacy of my office because, at the moment, my Italian heritage, which impacts my passion, anger, and appetite, is exposing my sentimentality as well. I would like to believe that I am tearing up because I am out from under the Journal deadlines – OK, maybe there are a few tears of joy for that – but in reality, I am overwhelmed by how unforeseen the circumstances and sacrifices of my life were in affording me the privilege of this year.

Several years ago (do not ask for specifics), I attended my 25th high school reunion. The nostalgia prompted me to open my senior yearbook. As I leafed through the pages, I reviewed the optimistic and profound quotes that we placed with our photographs. One of the quotes, by an anonymous author, struck me: "The important thing is that, at any time, we are willing to sacrifice who we are for what we might become." Challenge yourself to change. I keep this quote on my desk.

In my columns I have promoted advocacy because I strongly believe that advocacy, rather than a predisposition, can better the outcomes of the questions presented to us. I love the fact that there are not black and white solutions to the problems of family law litigants. I love the fact that attorneys and judges are forced to see the individualities, nuances, and distinctions of every family we touch. I love the fact that the advocacy of these differences forces creative solutions and evolving law, and that, through this evolution, we challenge ourselves to change.

Advocacy is really the management of change. Change is not always pleasant, and sometimes we have little or

no control. Nevertheless, change is inevitable, and it is important to refine the ability to manage what change we can. As attorneys and judges, we have an opportunity to make the changes of family law litigants less intimidating. Often parents react to the uncertainties of "the system." Their reactions result in defensive, combative posturing which trickles down to the children. It is much less stressful for these families in crisis if "the system" provides a respectful forum for change and the opportunity to resolve their disputes in a way that minimizes their sense of losing control.

This year, our Legislation Committee Chair, Kent Weichmann, must be commended for his efforts to take control of proposed family law changes in the Legislature. As a Type-A personality (hard to believe, I know) I am not comfortable having little or no control over anything, let alone legislative proposals which impact family law. However, throughout the year, family law continued to be a popular target for legislators. To this end, Kent's Committee and the Council were vigilant in monitoring related legislation. I know that I've said it before, but I enjoyed the debates by Council on legislative initiatives and proposed amicus positions. (They reminded me of exchanges among legislators before term limits.) More impressive, however, was the willingness of Council members – after the debates concluded and votes were taken – to balance their personal passions in favor of advancing Section positions so that the Section's positions were not diluted. That commitment, along with the flawless advice of our lobbyist, Bill Kandler, has served the Section well. The Section had several successful initiatives this year, including a bill to overturn Quade. More important, it was a player in the dialogues involving almost every initiative in which it has an interest. Thank you, Bill, for all of your help and support. Because our officers and chairs change over the years, your knowledge, consistency, and integrity have served our Section well. Additionally, I would like to acknowledge the hard work of Bill's assistant, Marcy Lay. Marcy provided countless hours and effort in support of the Section and has been vital to our advocacy efforts.

I have certainly changed – for the better, I hope – as a result of my interactions with Council and Section members, and I would like to thank my Executive Committee, all the Council members, and the liaisons for their dedication and support this year. I am pleased that, at our Annual Awards Dinner,

I will have an opportunity to acknowledge all of these individuals. (The dinner will be held in conjunction with the Annual Meeting of the State Bar in Ypsilanti – watch for more details.)

On a personal note, I want to recognize a few people at this time. During the year, I received letters and e-mails about my columns, Family Law seminars, and other Section projects. I hoped to respond separately to each author, but I have not been able to do so. Those communications were very important to me. It touched me to know that my words impacted some of you. Further, the messages helped me to expand input for Council business in an effort to become more inclusive of Section members and of divergent points of view.

More specifically, thanks to John Mills, our immediate past-Chair. He provided a strong structure last year which allowed me to steer an organization already on course. He will always be a dear friend and mentor. Norman Robbins, again, did a fabulous job of assembling the Journal and our Special Issue. This information is invaluable to our

members as is Norm. Similarly, Harvey Hauer edited a special family law edition of the Michigan Bar Journal for which I have received very positive feedback. Thank you to David Sarnacki for accepting the position of Chair-Elect. I was able to turn to David this year for help, advice, follow-through, and water goggles for my son in the Dominican Republic. His wit kept me going in tough times. He is a combination of knowledge, drive, and kindness. I know the Section will thrive under his leadership. Last but not least, I appreciate the understanding and support of my family. I was absent from home many hours and from many of my son's activities. (I think, though, that I made it up to Ryan, in part, when he accompanied me to several meetings and inhaled every variety of pastry available.)

Finally, I have a favor to ask. There is a change in my life over which I have no control. A family member, who is very special, was diagnosed last month with a very aggressive cancer. It would mean the world to me if you had a moment to share a thought or prayer for her strength and peace. I appreciate this indulgence, and I look forward to crossing paths in the future.

