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A PROMISE MADE IS A PROMISE KEPT

This year has given me many memories to cherish. One was introducing new admittees at the Swearing-In Ceremony in June. The Clerk handed me a list of names as I walked into the magnificent Supreme Court courtroom. I met each applicant in turn at the podium with only a moment to ask a few questions to capture something unique to mention about them before moving for their admission. Their families and loved ones looked on. I wanted to put them at ease, hoping to bring a smile and lessen their nervousness. More than anything, I wanted to let them know our legal community embraces them.

Not an October since 1991 has passed without my reminiscing over taking the attorney's oath and what led up to it. Think back to the three arduous years you invested reading and briefing cases, preparing outlines, and studying, all leading to a single exam or single paper for each class at the end of each semester. Follow that with the weeks and weeks of studying for the bar, the evening bar review classes after work, practicing exams to perfect answering 17 multiple choice questions in 30 minutes, the FBI background check, getting fingerprinted, and the bar exam itself that felt akin to a test of sheer endurance. Remember how you felt after answering the last multiple-choice question or essay. Then came the waiting.

My classmates and I trudged reverently to the hallway door outside Dean Wirtz's office where the results were taped before being published Sunday morning in print news for all the world to see. The trepidation unwound into joy and relief. Unlike our school grades, the exam score was irrelevant. We passed and that was all that mattered – for a brief time anyway.

Do you remember your swearing-in ceremony? Who moved your admission? What did they say on your behalf? I vividly remember promising to "honestly demean myself" in the practice of law because I found that to be curious phrasing. I took that identical and somewhat ironic sounding oath in Texas six months later. Years later, when filing a Petition for Writ of Certiorari in the United States Supreme Court, I promised to "conduct myself uprightly and according to law." A few things stood out to me when reading the oaths administered by all 50 states. Lawyers must still honestly demean themselves in eight states, most of which are located in the South. By the way, blogs on that phrase delve into the philosophy of law, then digress into disputes as to whether such a thing as a philosophy of law even exists. Lawyers will argue about anything.

Not surprisingly, every single oath commands an obligation to uphold the U.S. Constitution. Some have been revised to delete avowals of certain religious beliefs or disavowals of ideological or communistic sympathies. Massachusetts permits Quakers to "affirm" rather than "swear." It also competes with Maine in claiming rights to the oldest oath. The latter seceded from the Commonwealth, so I put my money

on Massachusetts. New Mexico adds the nice touch of everyone signing the Roll of Attorneys – a series of books dating from 1982. My sister Margaret signed the third of the five books. Kentucky's Constitution requires that attorneys swear they have not fought or acted as a second in a duel with deadly weapons. Maybe duels with non-lethal weapons are acceptable.

The Tennessee Supreme Court recognizes that the profession actually demands more of us than conducting ourselves honestly. On November 8, new admittees will take a new oath that captures other equally important duties:

I do solemnly swear or affirm that I will support the Constitution of the United States and the Constitution of the State of Tennessee. In the practice of my profession, I will conduct myself with honesty, fairness, integrity, and civility to the best of my skill and ability.

Their law school and bar exam experiences will be fresh in the minds of the 85 or so applicants. They will be nervous – not just because of the setting, the formality of the proceedings or that people are watching. Mostly, they will be concerned about what comes next.

Despite how much they have accomplished, now the real learning begins. Practicing law, and for many, the business of law.

Their concerns are compounded by the changing legal marketplace. The profession is more streamlined with technological advances. Clients demand more efficiency and lower cost. The traditional model of being an associate is somewhat of a luxury today. For so many new attorneys, the comforts of having work to perform, an income, support of other lawyers, and the structure of an established business with staff, office space and

equipment, research resources, a billing system, and so on, represent relative opulence.

Regardless of whether they are in a firm, an office sharing situation or working solo from their dining room tables, all these new lawyers need those of us with more experience. They need us to be good role models – putting clients at the center of all we do, being well prepared, striving for excellence, being civil and ethical. They also need our supportive ear, answers to their questions, and authentic acknowledgment that this profession is demanding on us as well. Supporting them is beneficial for them and for the collective.

I have read the new oath many times over as a renewal of the first oath I took and the ones thereafter. The attorneys' oath is a solemn undertaking. It is a promise, and once made, is to be kept. It is also a promise to be shared with and made to our newest colleagues.

To all the new lawyers, welcome to the most honorable profession. Welcome to the Bar.

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