

Thanks for the memories

I asked Dan Curry, your new Hotline Attorney, to let me do this final column. Come July 1, I'll be moving on to other adventures in life.

As I said to the board last fall when I told them I was anticipating retirement, this job began as a dream. I went to law school after four years as a reporter at the *Springfield News-Leader*, and when I got out of school, I went back to being a reporter, initially as a writer/columnist for a national trade magazine, then a financial writer/columnist for the *Kansas City Times*.

After two years there, I took a job as a litigation manager for a media insurance company and, while there, was introduced to the concept of a state's hotline attorney. Missouri didn't have one.

It wasn't long before I started dreaming my dream. And at the convention in the fall of 1992, it happened. My dream came true.

Since then, I've dedicated much of my life to being there whenever you needed me, to support journalists in Missouri. This has been such an education.

You've taught me about law in Missouri's criminal courts. You've taught me about the legislative process and how laws are written. I've learned how cameras in the courtroom work (and don't work).

I've learned the struggles newspaper publishers have.

But I've also learned the most important lesson for me. My background was from a somewhat large newspaper. There, I went from doing obits to covering federal court, a presidential campaign, the crash of the plane carrying Jerry Litton on election night. I'll admit I came into the hotline attorney job with a love of large metro papers.

This job gave me the chance to see up close the role smaller community newspapers play in their towns. Your reporters cover the local fair, the city council meeting (where nobody ever heard of the Sunshine Law) and then the local court docket, all in one day.

"Thanks again for the role each of you played in making this dream of mine come true. I truly am one of those lucky people who has never worked a day in her lifetime!"

(Well, perhaps I exaggerate a little, but I swear it's pretty close to reality).

Without community papers, nobody would know much about the candidates for their local races. Nobody would hear about money missing from the county or city financial records that a local official tapped into. And nobody would hear about Grandma Sally's hundredth birthday or the damage caused by a once-in-a-lifetime cicada emergence.

As we've seen large metro papers cut staff to the bones and move printing out of state, the advantage of a metro paper diminishes and my appreciation for community newspapers grows. Your reporters and the editor do it all. There certainly will always be a place for major metro papers, but both operations play key roles in covering news for citizens.

And I've learned to appreciate well-educated journalists. I am not talking about the result of our J-School, although it plays an extremely important role here. Some of us didn't go there. Some of you didn't even get the chance to go to college.

But I am amazed at how well some of you understand the law related to journalists. Especially the Sunshine Law. There is a huge appreciation by your hotline attorney for those of you who have learned to look up what the law says in order to better discuss the situation with your local citizens.

In fact, there have been many times I've had to pull my Sunshine Law handbook and check to make sure that you didn't understand it better than I did. The times I realize "you're right!" give me a great deal of pleasure! I've always wanted to leave you with a better grasp of the tools you need to do your job.

I similarly leave you in good hands with Dan Curry. Dan and I have worked the last few months to bring him up to speed and to give him all the resources he needs. Dan remembers calling the hotline attorney well back in the days before he began practicing law. He knows the job well.

Where am I going? Nowhere immediately, but in the next few months we are moving out to Santa Barbara, to be closer to family. I will find a way to keep my finger in journalism or law (although I'm not starting a practice out there!). I certainly want time to write for my own pleasure and maybe spend time on some hobbies.

Thanks again for the role each of you played in making this dream of mine come true. I truly am one of those lucky people who has never worked a day in her lifetime!



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