



Then, and NOW

By Charles Welton, Esq.

It was the TV shows like “The Defenders,” a father and son law office protecting the people of their community; or “Have Gun Will Travel,” where hired wild west gun slinger Paladin always found a way to help western frontier towns.

It was my Father, labor union member and organizer, along with the other mill town laborers.

It was my Mother, inculcating Midwestern Lutheran values to do good deeds.

It was the 60's, when we learned that “War is not healthy for children and other living things.”

It was the 50's, before that, warning of the military industrial complex represented by the man in the grey flannel suit.

It was “The Man” a/k/a The Machine, target for rebellion to promote the good.

That was then, but what about NOW? All of these things promoted a consistent message to me to become a lawyer to help regular people fighting the forces to oppress them. But how are the new law school graduates and young attorneys receiving messages to be on the side of people? For me, years of law practice have taught me that these endeavors are culturally worthwhile and spiritually rewarding, but if you have not that experience, how are you motivated?

The cultural messages which now envelop us are disparate and diffuse, with nothing much to grab onto. Take TV for example: The lawyer show is *The Good Wife*, where there is a context of assumed political corruption, and lawyer success is measured by gross revenue billed. Unions are in disfavor, seen as disabling capitalism. The messages coming out of churches are mixed to a point where money is seen as God's reward and good deeds take a back seat. It is a new millennium of social communication. Anyone can be your guru and anything tangible can be your goal.

I recall a singular moment signaling a cultural change at the intersection of law and media. In 1989, United Flight 232 from Denver to Chicago crashed down near Sioux City, Iowa. In the aftermath, an attorney appeared on television in a shiny suit with a gold earring and a cigar proclaiming, “They don't call it Sioux City for nothing.” Since then, societal messages and attorney images across the spectrum of media challenge lawyers who would consider stepping into the breach to represent regular people.

Prospective CTLA members from the ranks of new law school graduates and young lawyers are challenged by negative political messages. They are challenged by negative media images. They are challenged by the corporate culture prominent in our society. After all, even the American Trial Lawyers Association decided to change its name after being labeled, among other things, “tassle-loafered trial lawyers.”

In light of all these challenges extant today, I appreciate those of you who continue to join our ranks and become CTLA members, whether as new law school graduates, young lawyers, insurance defense defectors or general practitioners who want to represent the people in the community. Your challenges to arrive here seem to be greater today than they have been in decades. Thanks for joining us. ▲▲▲

Charley Welton left Minnesota to come to work at Denver General Hospital as a conscientious objector to the Viet Nam war and has stayed ever since. Following Macalester College and a year of law school at the University of Minnesota before being drafted, he completed his law degree at the University of Denver. Practicing plaintiff's damage litigation since 1974, with CTLA membership since 1975, Welton continues as a sole practitioner in Denver. Share your ideas in an essay about 'Who Are We' through email at welton@charleswelton.com.