

Fifty Years and Counting



**WSBA President
Steven G. Toole**

Fifty years ago, the average annual salary in this country was \$5,315; the average house cost \$16,500; a postage stamp was four cents; a loaf of bread cost 20 cents and a gallon of gas cost a quarter.

The Russian craft *Sputnik 5* carried two dogs and several rats and mice into orbit, and returned them safely back to Earth. Kennedy and Nixon met in the first-ever televised presidential debate. *To Kill a Mockingbird*, by Harper Lee, was published. Popular television shows were *The Flintstones*, *Candid Camera*, and *The Twilight Zone*. Elvis Presley ended his two-year stint in the U.S. Army. Notable movies were *Psycho*, *Spartacus*, and *The Alamo*. And, my personal favorite, The Ohio Art Company launched the Etch A Sketch in time for the holiday season.

In Washington state 50 years ago, Stanley Ann Dunham, mother of President Barack Obama, graduated from Mercer Island High School; Washington voters chose Richard Nixon over John F. Kennedy for U.S. President; and Albert Rosellini was elected to a second term as governor.

At the Washington State Bar Association, 40 people passed the winter bar exam and 87 candidates passed the July exam, compared with 355 people passing the February 2010 bar exam and 625 passing the July 2010 exam; and license fees increased from \$20 to \$25 for members in practice five years or more and fees for members practicing less than five years rose from \$10 to \$15.

So why am I taking you on this trip down memory lane? Other than the no-

tion that I find these types of facts interesting, I recently had the occasion to reflect on the calendar year 1960 as I was preparing remarks for the Washington State Bar Association's annual 50-Year Member Tribute Luncheon, which takes place in November. Every year, we have a new group of attorneys who celebrate 50 years as a member of the WSBA. This year, there were 53 such people being honored and, of those, 24 were in attendance with their families, friends, and colleagues. As president of the WSBA, it was my great

honored. However, for my predecessors to be so touched by this event, I thought there must be more. Undoubtedly, there are multiple reasons as to why this event and tribute are so significant to each of the honorees and the reasons may vary. But why is this celebration so meaningful for the others who are in attendance? Why was this going to be an event whose memory I would cherish above so many other events I would be attending, presiding over, and participating in as president of the Washington State Bar Association?

Upon consideration, I realized this celebration was an opportunity to reflect on 50 years of professional and personal accomplishments and perseverance. It is not often that we sit down and take the time to think about our lives. We are generally too caught up in living those lives and dealing with the issues that life presents us on a daily basis to take such reflection time. However, when we pay tribute to someone for 50 years of his or her life, how can you not take time to ruminate?

This tribute luncheon gave these 50-year members just such an opportunity; to reflect and to reminisce with their families, friends, and colleagues.

As I thought more about this, I appreciated that the opportunity to reflect was more than just considering past accomplishments. It was also a time to consider past failures, the lessons learned from them, and how those experiences helped to shape the lives of these honorees and who they ultimately became. This is a celebration of 50 years of living and gaining wisdom and then sharing that with other, perhaps younger, colleagues and friends. This luncheon provided the occasion to



President Steve Toole greets attendees of the 50-Year Members Tribute Luncheon.

honor and privilege to preside over this luncheon. In that capacity, I was called upon to make a few opening remarks. I was told by past WSBA presidents that this tribute luncheon was one of the highlights of their presidential year. In preparing my remarks, I kept asking myself, "Why?" What was so significant about this 50-year celebration such that my presidential predecessors would be so affected?

To answer this question, I needed to first determine what it was we were truly celebrating. Were we just acknowledging age and good health? I don't mean to belittle this as a great basis for a celebration, particularly for those who are being

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think about and cherish the personal and professional friendships made over the past 50 years and the families raised, the children, grandchildren, and perhaps great-grandchildren.

Those to whom we are paying tribute are also able to reflect on the lives they've touched and influenced. They are likely unaware of so many of the people they have influenced; the attendee at a seminar who received some great words of wisdom or practicality from the 50-year member who was one of the presenters, the attorney sitting in the back of the courtroom watching and learning from what he or she observed when this experienced attorney addressed the court or the jury, the young associate who watched how this old pro negotiated a settlement or a contract in a case. The examples can be many.

Just as important as the opportunity to reflect on the past 50 years, this lun-

cheon provides a chance for these honored members to consider what they still have to accomplish in their lives. Many of those who attend are still vibrant members of the legal community and are active in their practices, pro bono activities, bar activities, and community activities. They are not ready to put away their pen and briefcase and merely retire to a warmer climate and a life of travel, golf, shopping, and people-watching. That is one of the perks of the practice of law; we can continue it at some level so long as our minds continue to function. The legal profession provides us unending opportunities to give and to serve others. In this regard, the one constant that is true about everyone celebrating 50 years of membership in the WSBA is that they have spent a lifetime serving others; of being in service.

Those people we celebrate once a year at this tribute luncheon all pursued a career in a profession of which we are

all proud. It is a profession that is now and has always been considered honorable. In being in service for 50 years, the honorees have helped many people; they have made a difference — to their clients, their profession, and their communities. These lawyers are *unsung heroes*, being in service in the trenches, day after day, for 50 years. For many, they have received no acknowledgment until this 50-year member tribute. They have spent a career having to put up with all the bad lawyer jokes and bad press that is showered upon lawyers and have never tooted their own horns as to all the good things they have done and continue to do. The first thing we tell new lawyers to do is to get involved with their communities and volunteer their time, energy, and knowledge of the law. Those 50-year honorees received the same advice from their mentors and as the lawyers before them, they got involved and continued to be involved, for 50 years. They got involved in community associations, civic and other volunteer boards, and other grassroots organizations. They gave their time, energy, and legal expertise and they never sought compensation, attention, or praise.

As I mentioned, at the November 2010 50-Year Member Tribute Luncheon, we were honoring 53 people who were celebrating 50 years as members of the Washington State Bar Association. Collectively, that is 2,650 years of lawyering; 2,650 years of serving others and doing honorable work. Those 24 who attended the tribute luncheon earned the right to have an opportunity to reflect and bask in what they have accomplished in their careers. They earned the right to share this celebration with their families, friends, and colleagues, to share their stories and memories, *and to be acknowledged*. And for those of us who were able to be part of this experience, to share those memories with them and to be inspired by them, we are truly fortunate.

As for me, I now know why my predecessors as president of the Washington State Bar Association consider this tribute luncheon to be one of the highlights of their presidential year. ☺

For photos and a recap of the event, see page 28 in this issue.

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