

I woke up one morning and realized that I had become...

A SENIOR PARALEGAL!

By Sharon Spinelli

I offered to write an article for this issue of *ParaPhrase*, not having any particular subject in mind. As I was driving to the University of Hartford the morning of April 21 to participate on a panel for the Intro to Paralegal Studies class, I started thinking about where I am in my professional life. By time you read this article, I will have celebrated my 22nd anniversary at Reid and Riege. I remember back to September 1986 when I myself was a new paralegal student at Hartford College for Women (now part of University of Hartford), having just been “promoted” from secretary to paralegal at the firm. And here I find myself at a point in my life where I can give back to my profession by sharing something of my years of experience with people just like I was once upon a time, just starting out in the rewarding career of a paralegal.

The Intro to Paralegal Studies class was a wonderful experience, so wonderful in fact that I stayed much longer than I had planned. I was one of six present or former paralegals who spoke to a class of 10-12 students, several of whom were men (nice to see in a historically female profession) and most of whom did not appear to be traditional (really young) college students. I was delighted to hear the varied and thoughtful questions asked of the panelists and was equally pleased to have an opportunity to share with the students the importance of belonging to a paralegal association. Listening to the stories of the other panelists and partaking in the group discussion rounded out a very positive class. In this day and age where there are more and more cases of “non-traditional paralegals”, it was not surprising to hear two of the panelists describe how they left the paralegal profession for jobs very much related to their former paralegal work. In speaking with the students after the class, it was obvious how much they learned from us and appreciated our being there.

Also by time you read this article, I will have made formal announcement of my decision not to run for a third term as NFPA’s Region V Director. While being on this board has been a remarkable and fulfilling experience, it is time for me to let someone else have this tremendous opportunity. Looking back at my two years of service (to date), it is clear to see how much I have grown as a person. I am much more tolerant and respectful of others and have a new appreciation for what it means to be part of a team. I realize the value of networking with other professionals and that just being a member of an association is not enough. It is incumbent upon each member to actively participate in some way, big or small, for the greater good of the organization. I have thoroughly enjoyed all of the traveling I have done either as CCPA’s Primary delegate or as Region Director, including Cleveland, Las Vegas twice, Seattle, Kansas City, Little Rock, Rochester, Chicago, Nashville, Sacramento, Albany, Manchester, NH, Worcester, MA and Long Island, NY. It has been wonderful to meet and work with people from across the country.

The primary reasons for my deciding not to run for another term are Michelle and Nicholas, my 16 and 12 year old kids, and Michael, my husband, who have all been really good sports about letting me pack up and leave whenever I need to. They too have learned a good deal about life and responsibility from their making due without me at home. I need to be around for the next couple of years before Michelle heads off to college, and I don't want to miss any more sports banquets, concerts or art shows than I already have.

I also have become uncomfortable with the fact that I am not a PACE Registered Paralegal vis a vis my position as a board member. A few people have expressed their opinion that all members of the NFPA Board of Directors should be required to be RP's if we are going to encourage our members to take PACE. I think this is a very valid argument and imagine that, not too far in the future, the delegates of NFPA will mandate this requirement. To date, I have personally not found the time or need to take PACE but will continue to reconsider that position.

I firmly believe that I have represented Region V well during my term and that NFPA is better off because of my service to its members. Again I think that my years of experience in the profession, the desire to achieve personal and professional growth, and the maturity I've gained in recent years all added up to my service on the board coming at the right time in my life.

So I write this article, not at all as a senior citizen (I'm only 41!), and not even with an official job title as "senior paralegal" as my firm doesn't offer such a title, but as a mature woman having made my way through the bumps of growing up in the professional world, achieved a tremendous amount for myself, my firm and my profession and left my mark on the local and national paralegal world.

And I'm not even done yet!

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