



'The Gift of Technology'— 50-YEAR LAWYERS LOOK BACK

"The legal profession has changed since 1970, not because the individuals practicing law have changed, but technology has dictated the change with the personal computer, cell telephone, online research, among others, driving that change. No longer is the attorney subservient to the office library, the staff assistant, or the office itself. ... The attorney of 2020 is independent, that independence being the gift of technology."

—Calvin A. Hartmann, 50-year Texas lawyer

TECHNOLOGY CAN BE A DOUBLE-EDGED SWORD, but it has never felt more like a gift than during the coronavirus pandemic. After many of us started sheltering in place to help stop the spread of COVID-19, videoconference apps became a lifeline, letting us not only converse with clients but also check in on friends and family who otherwise may be isolated hundreds of miles away.

Like many of you, the State Bar staff and I have been working remotely since mid-March. With the exception of in-person meetings, the State Bar has been fully operational. The Texas Supreme Court has continued its work with remote oral arguments and videoconferences, while responding to the evolving needs of our state with a series of emergency orders. And the Office of Court Administration equipped judges throughout the state with Zoom licenses to enable remote video proceedings. We can't know whether these events portend long-term changes, and I will leave the prognosticating to others. Instead, with this column I invite you to look back to 1970 and consider how much our profession has evolved.

The State Bar traditionally recognizes each class of 50-year lawyers at the Annual Meeting.¹ This year, we also invited the class of 1970 to write short essays on changes they've witnessed for possible publication in the *Texas Bar Journal*. Many responded to the invitation, including Calvin A. Hartmann, of Spring, whose words begin this column. Their submissions mostly preceded the coronavirus outbreak in Texas, but their comments on technology seem especially timely for this period of remote working.

"Starting with the crackle of automated typewriters, floppy discs, WordPerfect and all the rest, work eventually became portable in our notebook computers," wrote Richard L. Petronella, of Houston. "Now we bring our office home ... in tiny electronics."

"The technology revolution has changed the law practice the most," wrote Kelly Frels, of Houston, who served as State Bar president in 2004-2005 and is one of four past presidents in this year's class, along with Allan K. DuBois, Harriet Miers, and Terry Tottenham.

"When I started practicing, the IBM Selectric typewriter was a new phenomenon," Shelly Juskiewicz, of Dallas, reminisced. "There were no fax machines, emails, and, of course, no internet."

The arrival of e-filing was another major advancement, wrote Mary Ellen Keith, of Meadowlakes. "E-filing is great for courts since clerks and lawyers no longer haul boxes of paper to the courtroom," she wrote. "A computer easily handles legal research; no more dusty library trips!"

Despite the changes, these 50-year lawyers haven't lost sight of what it means to be a member of our profession. It's clear from their own words that they still believe in the basics: be honest, treat others with respect, and do the right thing no matter the circumstance. (Be on the lookout for more of their comments in next month's issue.)

I'll close with the words of Clinton S. Morse, a 50-year Texas lawyer based in Roanoke, Virginia: "Even though the practice of law has become big business in almost every aspect, one thing has not changed. The people we serve are still considered clients, not customers, and they still respond with great appreciation to the loyal attorneys who have done the very best job that they can to represent them professionally."

Sincerely,

TREY APFFEL

Executive Director, State Bar of Texas
Editor-in-Chief, *Texas Bar Journal*

NOTES

1. The 2020 State Bar of Texas Annual Meeting in Dallas is canceled due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The 50-year lawyer class of 1970 will be recognized at the 2021 Annual Meeting in Fort Worth.