

The Judge's Daughter: THE BALD TRUTH

WRITTEN BY PAMELA BUCHMEYER

HAPPY SONGS. MY FRIEND IS COLLECTING UPBEAT TUNES AS A CHEER-UP PROJECT DURING THE PANDEMIC. The virus has lingered, and her playlist has grown to over 12 hours. We sit in lawn chairs in the evening—careful to wear masks and keep a social distance—to listen. Humming along definitely relieves tension.

Levity, a chuckle, and a grin can also help ease the sometimes-overwhelming stress of the legal profession. That's what my father believed, the late Judge Jerry Buchmeyer, who wrote a legal humor column for 28 years for the *Texas Bar Journal*. Back then, Dad was concerned about heart attacks, alcoholism, and the neglect of friends and families. Today we could add a few more worries to that roster—hurricanes, recession, and a devastating virus.

TexasBarCLE offers several free online courses about dealing with tough times during the era of COVID-19. The importance of fellowship with colleagues is mentioned often. You must agree because my email has been flooded with light-hearted contributions for this column.

This month, as my father would say, “We’ve got a couple of real doozies.” Humor, hope, and healing. We’re all in this together. Don’t be a stranger. Reach out to me at pambuchmeyer@gmail.com.

See (!!) How Readers Respond

Walter M. “Mac” Miller III, of El Campo, wrote in to reminisce about the best cross-examination ever. He was a prosecutor and the defendant accused of bank robbery decided to question the bank teller himself:

“Isn’t it true you couldn’t really identify me because I had my mask on?”

And Harold K. Watson, of Houston, has a new collective noun to add to my prior column, “A Skulk of Thieves.” A solicitor friend in London invited Harold to a meeting of the Clergy Support Trust, a group formed during the Civil War when Catholic clerics were turned out of their parishes by the Puritans. The clergy meeting was a grand affair full of pomp and circumstance including a parade of bishops in full regalia led by the archbishop of Canterbury. Harold whispered to his seatmate, the dean of Southwark Cathedral.

Harold: Pray tell, what do you call a group of bishops?
Dean of Southwark (with a grin and a wink): Why it’s a *sea of bishops*, of course.

A clever pun, indeed. For as Harold reminds us, the seat of authority for bishops or archbishops is called the episcopal see.

The Dazzling Pate of Justice

All lawyers study the legendary “hairy hand” case in damages class in law school. But what about a more recent case

exemplifying the baldpate of justice? Judge Patricia Baca Bennett, of Fort Worth, sends in a classic bit of testimony heard when her esteemed yet follicly challenged colleague, Associate Judge Matthew F. Riek, was on the bench. Many thanks, Judge Riek, for being a good sport.

The court: Alright. Sir, thanks for your testimony today.

Witness: OK ... Thanks for letting me come up here. You know what, judge? I’m not trying to be funny, honest to God. But I love the shine on the top of your head. I know how bald is—I don’t know what you’re using. I don’t know if it’s the baby oil—

The court: OK. That’s a first.

Witness: Yeah, but ... seriously. It looks like a beautiful glazed munchkin....

The court (wisely): I’m going to have you step out.

Witness: Thank you guys. I’m sorry for all of this. I hope it all goes well. Can I give [party in the case] a hug?

The court: No. I’m going to have you step back out. Thanks.

Witness: Thank you guys ... Thank you lawyers. Thanks, guys, for the good time.

No word yet about the witness’ own coiffure.

JUDGE JERRY L. BUCHMEYER (1933-2009) grew up in Overton and served as a federal judge in the Northern District of Texas after being nominated in 1979 by President Jimmy Carter. His monthly legal humor column ran in the *Texas Bar Journal* from 1980 to 2008.





A Song for the Jurors

Joseph R. Signore is a prosecutor in El Paso, and he's infamous around his office as the guy who prosecuted the Backstreet Boys' case. Now, the legendary 1990s boy band was not actually involved as a party or witness, but instead, a woman who was a monumental Backstreet Boys fan claimed harassment by her ex-husband, who flew 1,900 miles to follow her onto a cruise ship featuring performances by the actual Backstreet Boys. The ex-husband defended his actions saying that he, too, was a mega-fan of the mega-famous group that has sold over 100 million records worldwide.

Both parties planned to introduce as trial exhibits photos of themselves on deck posing with members of the band. Joseph's colleagues couldn't help themselves. Every time they saw him at the coffeepot or walking down the hall, they burst into song: "I Want It That Way," or "Shape of My Heart," or even "Quit Playing Games (with My Heart)."

After weeks of torturous, off-tune warbling, Joseph made an idle boast that would come to haunt him—even more so than the haunted house video for the Backstreet Boys tune "Everybody (Backstreet's Back)."

Joseph pledged to "use a lyric by the Backstreet Boys in my closing argument." Word quickly spread through the courthouse, and by the last day of trial, seats were packed for a standing-room-only audience. But how could Joseph sing a song to the jury without wrecking the requisite courtroom decorum? The answer was found, of course, in the number one hit song "Show Me the Meaning of Being Lonely."

In summation ... my job as a prosecutor for the state of Texas is to ensure that justice is served. Ladies and gentlemen, show me the meaning of justice, and find the defendant guilty.

Unfortunately, Joseph did not win the case. But he did throw in a hand gesture reminiscent of the boys' unforgettable dance choreography.

The Court Zooms

Judge Michael Petty submitted an entertaining vignette about

his first court hearing conducted solely online. His jurisdiction is a smaller town outside of Dallas, which we'll call "Smallville" out of respect for the privacy of the court participants. The Office of Court Administration had established guidelines, written scripts, and conducted dress rehearsals for the court's use during Zoom hearings.

A juvenile plea docket was chosen for the first test. Nine defendants along with their family members checked in with the court clerk and then were escorted into a virtual courtroom.

Judge Petty saw nine boxes on his computer screen, each showing several nervous folks crowded onto sofas, clustered on outdoor patios, or gathered around kitchen and dining room tables.

Ready to begin, the bailiff appeared on screen in uniform. His pre-approved script consisted of exactly two written lines: "Municipal Court for the City of Smallville now in session, the honorable Judge Michael Petty presiding."

However, sometimes there is simply no escaping the powerful pull of longstanding habits.

The bailiff's script went out the window, so to speak, when instead he announced in his deep, official, sonorous voice: "ALL RISE."

Judge Petty watched as all nine sets of remote court attendees jumped to their feet. The clamor of nine sets of tables and chairs being scooted back filled his ears. Laptops, iPads, and smartphones went flying. Nine screens of bedlam ensued. It took a full 20 minutes before any sense of decorum could be restored. "Lesson learned," Judge Petty says with a grin.

But isn't it moving to think of the patriotic respect paid by all court attendees to the judge?

Be safe and be well, my friends. **TBJ**



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