

Prologue

I'll have the blue plate special...

by **Charles J. Zauzig, III**
 VTLA President 2007-2008



At first blush, I thought I got the first word here because this is one of those things presidents gets to do. Now I realize I was asked to introduce the main attraction - an informative, fun, even introspective collection of articles from our stalwarts, our proven masters of advocacy, our past presidents. When they read this they will chuckle at my acknowledgement of my junior status and at the fact that I should have immediately realized the obvious. Well not one to merely introduce, let me brashly set forth with my own story.

It's 1979 and I have been out of law school maybe a year. In vain, I had been trying to get on the state court appointed list so I could launch into what I was certain to be instant stardom in criminal defense. So I got on the federal list. I was assigned my first case, on Main Street in Richmond, in the courtroom of the Honorable Robert Merhige. The Assistant U.S. Attorney is calmly and expertly laying out the position of the government. I'm shaking in my boots and then it's my turn. At that moment, and frankly much earlier than that, I knew this stardom thing was way overrated and illusive too. I reached the podium and stated my name. I was going to say more....and...then I heard, "Mr. Zauzig, the Court is going to adjourn at this time and I want you to approach the bench."

How could I have messed up already? I only said my name. I stood when I spoke, behind the podium, sat at the right table, briefcase on the floor and not on the table, yet here I was on the death march across the longest courtroom imaginable. "Mr. Zauzig, what are you doing for lunch? Nothing? Good. You're going with us."

"Us" was Judge Merhige, his marshals, and me. We ate at a blue plate special counter. We all had the blue plate and talked about things that time had erased.

Time will never erase that kind gesture from a giant of a man. From that moment, the law had a dignity different from before, maybe humanity would be a better word.

For trial lawyers, the practice of law is not so much the rote application of rules, statutes, or procedures. What really motivates us is a vigilance to ensure the Constitution withstands assaults to weaken fundamental rights and responsibilities, including the right to a jury. Every day our clients breathe life into our system of jurisprudence, a system that thrives only when there is full access, complete accountability, and citizen juries. It is in the families devastated by wrongdoing that we see humanity brought to our laws, our Constitution.

Just as a young lawyer is humbled by a Judge and the system he represents with a simple blue plate special, so are all Americans humbled by our majestic Constitution, inviting us all to the table for the blue plate special.

As you read through the articles that follow, hopefully you will look behind the words and recognize that the authors have a passion for what we do, who we represent and what we represent. Enjoy!

Editor's Note

Welcome to a unique issue of *The Journal*. The Publications Committee asked every past President of our Association still serving on our Board to share their thoughts with our readers. Our instructions were simple: write as much or as little as you want on any topic of your choosing. Some responded with technical advice on procedural aspects of trial practice to help other lawyers improve their skills while others responded with inspirational personal stories about the joys and frustrations they had experienced in their careers. Some even provided a historical perspective on the Association or described significant changes they had witnessed in the law since their admission to the Bar. We hope you will appreciate the diversity in thought each of our Past Presidents has provided in their articles. Read, debate, learn, and enjoy this special issue of *The Journal*.