



# President's Column

By Collins Wohner



The holidays are around the corner. CABA's annual Christmas party is Thursday, December 5<sup>th</sup>, from 5:30 to 7:30 at the Old Capitol Inn. It is always a good time.

Plan to come and enjoy good food and fellowship with the CABA membership. Remember to bring a toy for JYL's Toys for Tots drive.

CABA is grateful to Dean Richard Gershon for making the trip from Oxford to speak at the August meeting. The Dean brought us up to date on developments at Ole Miss Law School. The turnout for the meeting is a testament to CABA's interest in and support for the law school.

We are also grateful to Mississippi Bar General Counsel Adam Kilgore and Deputy General Counsel Missye Martin for providing an hour of ethics CLE at the October meeting. Adam and Missye brought us up to date on Ethics Opinion 259 on metadata and then threw in a general overview of the attorney discipline process to boot. It was a useful presentation offered in a lively manner. Adam and Missye have worked out a dialogue format that keeps things interesting.

The pro bono committee reported success with their Lawyers in the Library event on October 21 at the Eudora Welty Library. As many as 70 people received help with family law, criminal law and expungements, social security, disability, and estate planning issues. Thanks to Carlyn Hicks and Tiffany Graves for spearheading the event. (See photos from the Lawyers in the Library event on pp. 14-15.)

The Community Outreach Committee had the benefit of great weather for the Gallant Hearts Dog Walk on November 2. Gallant Hearts breeds, raises and trains guide dogs for the blind. Thanks go to Committee Chair LeAnn Nealey for organizing the event and for the volunteers who turned out to represent CABA.

The CABA presidency has not previously been lacking in opportunities for embarrassment. Every membership meeting affords the chance to mispronounce a judge's name or two, to fail to introduce a judge who is there, to mistakenly introduce one who isn't, or to go for a grand slam of all of the above. Now the president also gets to attempt the feat of synchronized candle lighting before the assembled dignity of the *en banc* Mississippi Supreme Court, the Court of Appeals and many other honored guests during the annual Mississippi Bar

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# 2013 CABA CHRISTMAS Party

December 5th • 5:30–7:30 pm  
at the Old Capitol Inn  
*Toys for Tots will be collected.*



## Upcoming Events

**December 5**  
CABA Christmas Party

**February 18**  
Membership Meeting  
Noon at the Capital Club  
Speaker: Dean Jim Rosenblatt, Mississippi College School of Law

The views expressed in the articles published are solely those of the authors and do not represent the views of CABA, its officers, directors, or staff.

# Ode to Home: Mother's Words Bring Life to the Practice of Law

By C. Meade Hartfield



My mother has a knack for saying funny little phrases that, with her thick southern accent, just seem to stick with me. Her quips have become my mantras for enjoying life and

the practice of law. Here are a select few of her wise words.

## “Sing, baby, sing.”

I grew up with a passion for music, and my mother sat through many vocal solos in many settings. She used to eagerly tell me before I went on stage, “just sing.” It was such a simple phrase that meant so much more. She wanted me to relax, focus on the message of the song and connect with the audience. The same principle applies in practicing law. Whether your audience is a judge or jury, you want to engage them in your message. To do that, you must forget about the microphone, the size of the room, all the eyeballs on you and the number of listening ears. You must get motivated about the meaning behind your message and the need to captivate, entertain and move your audience as they sit in their seats.

Anyone who has ever performed in the courtroom, be it through a jury trial or motion practice, can appreciate the difference between an experience where you were so focused on the expectations of those around you that you failed to meet them, and an argument where your phrasing rolled off the tongue like prose from Walt Whitman. A bad experience will teach you that if you allow the setting to be a distraction, you miss the exhilaration of the moment, and you sacrifice the effectiveness of your argument.

A song tells a story, and so must your oral

argument. Just as important as the correct song choice, you must tell the story in a way that complements your vocal abilities, one in which you feel comfortable and about which you are passionate to share. Mother knew that, as a singer, I had to let go and yield to the music and just “Sing, baby, sing.” A talented litigator who does the same with his or her argument will be equally well received.

## “Be good. Be quick. Be done.”

Many lawyers love the sound of their voices, and like a broken record, they play their song too loudly and too long. But brevity packs more punch, and my mother has always understood that. Anytime I had a speech to give at school, Mother pulled out the old zinger, “Be good. Be quick. Be done.” Mother understood that people have short attention spans. The last thing you want is for people to tune you out because they are tired of your voice and your worn out message. Make your points; make them well; move on. If you feel you must hammer home a particular argument, find a fresh way to say it—every time.

## “Stand up!”

You would never know it by looking at her, a pillar of poise and strength, but Mother is a little bit of a rebel, maybe a lot. She has never been afraid to go against the grain of popular opinion, does not cave to peer pressure, and stands firm for her principles. As she puts it, you have to “Stand up!” and plant your feet for things that matter. There is nothing more entertaining to me than to watch her get fired up about something in which she believes. If she is seated, her back comes off the chair and her already erect posture becomes more pronounced, as she raises her always polished hand to make a point. If standing, she stands tall with her shoulders square to the person with whom she is debating, so that she can

meet his or her gaze dead on and be fully engaged in the discussion. With grace and conviction, she captivates your attention, and your ears perk up because you want to hear what she has to say.

Much the same, good lawyers fight hard for their cause, with panache. They channel their passion for finding the truth in a given situation, and they bring it with enthusiasm to the center of the judge’s and jury’s attention. They rally and inspire their legal team to find creative ways to tell the story and win the case. They do not give in to the majority opinion if their minority position would yield the right result, and they search incessantly for a way to shed new light on old theories to fit the facts at hand. Good lawyers will always “Stand up!” when it is time to do so.

## “Work won’t kill you. Worry will.”

Those in my household were never short on work ethic. Mother made sure. But Mother also made sure that we tempered our drive for productivity and accomplishment with a reality check on our emotions and physical health. While Mother very much believes in hard work, she does not believe in getting worked up with worry over the task at hand. Rather than internalizing what may seem like an overwhelming, monumental task, Mother has always encouraged me to take one thing at a time, to put one foot in front of the other, to make forward progress. By focusing my energy on what I can do and then doing that, I can see in retrospect just how much I have actually accomplished, certainly a great deal more than if I waste my energy fretting.

Practicing law can be stressful. You worry over deadlines and stress about contributing to the firm’s bottom line. You fret over scheduling quagmires and how much time it takes to get even the smallest thing accomplished. You agonize over why you cannot find the case that



you know must be out there ... somewhere, in some state, where some court must have put your brilliant thought in writing. Sometimes you are just so tired and your perspective so distorted, worry feels like your constant companion. When it gets to be too much, take a minute and regroup. Remember yourself. Do what you can, when you can. Stop and rest. Then pick up where you left off. Your productivity will explode instead of your health and sanity.

**“It’s a ‘flamingo’ day.”**

After I started practicing law, my parents moved to the beach. Whenever I called in the mornings to check on them, I would ask Mother how she was doing. “Oh, it’s another ‘flamingo’ day,” she usually said while drinking out of a bright pink coffee mug decorated with tropical trees and a flamingo-neck handle. My mother made a point to say she was simply enjoying her day. At first, I was sure her flamingo perspective was based on her enthusiasm for her newly found freedom in the sun and sand. However, “flamingo” became a staple of her vocabulary and, after a while, I understood that the phrase was really a directive to me, a Mother-knows-best instruction to soak up the simple pleasures of each day.

If ever the burdens of litigation seem heavier than a stack of treatises, my mother’s words ring in my ear, and I am instantly reminded to enjoy the sunshine, appreciate the people around me, and to regain my perspective on the value of contentment and joy in such a demanding profession. I am reminded to take pleasure in the profession and to make the most of each moment. Lighten your load today, and remember that every day should be “a flamingo day.”

**“Everybody has a choice in life: right or wrong. Choose right.”**

Whenever I was faced with a dilemma growing up, and even today, Mother has always been wise enough not to tell me what decision to make. Instead, she listens closely and serves only as a sounding board and a facilitator to my decision-making. One statement she has made consistently over the years is, “Choose

**“One statement she has made consistently over the years is, “Choose right.” Everybody needs that simple reminder. Lawyers need it every day.**

right.” Everybody needs that simple reminder. Lawyers need it every day.

As professionals, lawyers are tasked with an extra layer of fiduciary duties, and we are constantly faced with ethical obligations that compel us to cling to this principle. Recording time accurately; billing clients appropriately; negotiating settlement at the logical time, in a truthful way with opposing counsel; doing thorough research and briefing—each task presents a choice. Choose wisely; do the right thing.

**“Your name will go farther than you will.”**

No, Mother was not saying I would not amount to anything—quite the opposite. She was saying that whatever I say and do will travel farther and affect more people than I ever thought it would. This is another way of saying, “your reputation precedes you.” Our words and actions do not stay in the bubble in which we live.

Your firm gets referrals based on this principle. Think about your firm’s best partners. Their names may be discussed in law firms across the country based on a result they achieved in a case (or consistently achieve in an area of the law). Those making the referral probably know very little about the specifics of the win, but for some reason, they remember that this attorney is known as a good lawyer, one you want on your team.

In the legal world, your reputation is critical to your success. You must carefully build, protect and preserve your identity as a lawyer who provides high quality service and adds value to any case. The saying has special meaning in the context of law firms, and you should also remember that “Your firm’s name will go farther than you will” as well. When you join a firm, you take on that firm’s identity, and you should protect it like your own. Everybody has a few stories in his or her pocket about “that lawyer from ABC firm.” No one wants to be that guy or gal.

Remember, your choices will outlast you and will shape your legal legacy. Make it a good one.

Mother surely has been right about a lot of things. ➡

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**Postscript:** Meade wrote the first version of this article in May 2010. In March 2012, Meade’s mother, Sherry Pierce Hartfield, was diagnosed with stage IV inflammatory breast carcinoma (IBC), a very rare and aggressive form of breast cancer with no known cure. More than a year and a half later, tests showed no evidence of the disease, a true testimony to the remarkable strides in treatment and the awesome power of prayer. While the latest scans have shown some activity, Sherry has kept her witty and wise perspective. Sherry continues cancer treatments, and she makes every day a “flamingo” day.

**President’s Column**  
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Memorial Service—a dignified and moving ceremony. The CABA and JYL presidents have been asked to serve as *ex-officio* members of the Memorial Committee. They greet, usher and then light memorial candles during the beautifully solemn reading of the names of our fellow lawyers who passed away during the past year. A grown lawyer perhaps ought to be able to light some candles without palms sweating and knees knocking, but then...

Our next regular membership meeting is February 18, 2014. We look forward to hearing from Dean Jim Rosenblatt about developments at Mississippi College School of Law and his recent decision to step down as Dean and step in as a professor in the coming year. Be sure to join us. ➡