

Grace, Gratitude, and Green Beans

Give thanks and show kindness, in November and throughout the year.

BY JILL ROTHSTEIN

I've been in Wisconsin about three months now – which is apparently exactly the amount of time necessary for me to develop an appreciation of how much I have to learn, not just about the State Bar of Wisconsin and our members but also about Wisconsin and its culture.

I love culinary arts and history, and I have discovered I have a particular interest in the cuisine of Wisconsin. I find that understanding the “culture of the table” and of how we feed one another leads me to a deeper understanding of a place and its history, which, in turn, gives me a greater understanding of this amazing state where I now live, work, and break bread.

In addition to discovering the marvel that is the Friday fish fry (awesome!), I have learned that Wisconsin is the top producer of snap beans in the US. This year, as I pause to reflect and be grateful, I will blend my traditions, new and old. I will have a new appreciation for the southern recipe green bean casserole on my Wisconsin table and for what green beans represent to this state, its farmers, its history, and its economy.

My newfound gratitude for Wisconsin extends beyond the table. I am grateful to all State Bar members who have made me welcome here. You have shown me hospitality to rival that of my southern roots, and I am so thankful to have come to a place like this.

In addition to hospitality and kindness, I am also very grateful to those Bar members who have shown me grace. I have made some mistakes in my first few months – forgetting a name, attributing an award to the wrong person, and arriving at the wrong place at the wrong time. Without exception, I have received nothing but grace and kindness in the face of my mistakes. That grace, given freely to me, has prompted me to try and identify new ways in which I can offer that same grace to others.

Jack Pringle, a friend, colleague, and lifelong yoga buddy, uses Hanlon's Razor as a teaching tool in many of his lectures. I have completely stolen it from him (thanks Jack!) and offer it here for your consideration. Hanlon's Razor says, “never attribute to malice that which can be attributed to stupidity.” Hanlon's words are perhaps somewhat undiplomatic, yet the message is clear. Give each other grace: give each other the benefit of the doubt, give each other room to make mistakes. I like to think that we can all translate Hanlon's Razor to our own practices: When can we give one another the benefit of the doubt? When can we show our colleagues, and other people, grace in the face of their mistakes? Can we be examples of civility and collegiality to one another such that our clients begin to understand that “opponent” does not have to mean “enemy”?

I am optimistic. Lawyers, as keepers and protectors of our democracy, have the ideal platform to exercise Hanlon's Razor in a manner that personifies the ideals to which we all aspire. So, in the upcoming months, I will challenge myself. How can I lift our mission and our values higher? How will I, as a steward of our democracy, encourage others by my good example? How can I “feed” others, both as I gather with others to enjoy a meal together and as a gracious and good colleague? How can I act in a manner that celebrates each of us and the work we all do under the big tent of the State Bar of Wisconsin? I invite you to join me. **WL**



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