

Short Stories Do the Trick

By Michael J. Mestayer, 2026–27 LBF President



Life is a lot like the practice of law. The more interesting the story you tell, the easier it is to make your point. Since the point of the LBF President's Message is to inform members of the Bar of the LBF's activities and to garner greater support for the LBF, I offer these two short stories.

Cast a Wide Net

Awhile back, I was invited on a fishing trip to Marsh Island on the promise that the "specks are running." When we arrived there, I was astounded at the vast number of alligators that had decided this desolate island was a fine place to settle. Apparently, the speckled trout had the same idea and the trip was poised for promising results. Now, it has been my experience that speckled trout really like live shrimp, so instead of purchasing any before we departed the landing, we decided that we would just use a cast net to retrieve our bait. Smart — right?

Eager to get started, I grabbed the cast net, and in great South Louisiana fashion, made a heaving throw into an area of the canal that looked most promising. The net sailed into the air, formed a perfect circle, and gracefully landed precisely where I had planned. "Awesome," I thought. The only problem was the fact that I had forgotten to hold onto the other end of the line. The result — net lost, alligators all around. Not a good time for a dive to retrieve the net. Except for the dozens of crabs that we caught, it would have been a wasted trip.

So, how does this relate to the

Louisiana Bar Foundation? It occurred to me that the LBF is figuratively the wide net that covers our 70+ grantee organizations who provide free civil legal aid around the State. It is the job of the LBF to hold onto the line that oversees all of that great work to assure that we provide the best use of our resources for a successful catch. Each "throw" allows greater engagement with the community in need.

Each member of the Bar knows best where that need exists in his/her community so that the LBF can net a successful catch and expand the reach of the services that our grantee organizations provide. So, I urge you to grab a net, but hang onto the rope. Become a Fellow of the LBF, join one of our nine Community Partnership Panels throughout the State or simply volunteer at one of the many organizations that the LBF supports. Boiled crabs are great, but speckled trout is better.

A Little Goes a Long Way

It was 1988, and I had just completed a two-week jury trial in Shreveport. It was an emotional case involving a heavy truck rollover accident that left a young wife and daughter without a husband or father. The daughter's testimony left everyone in the courtroom in tears as she recounted how her dad was her hero.

The judge who presided over the case had a remarkable ability to relate to the jurors, the witnesses (including the experts), but more importantly, the lawyers. He was objective, but not cold. Decisive,

but not overbearing. Empathetic, but not emotional. In short, he did his job as one would expect — or hope. I was impressed.

In fact, I was so impressed, that after the appeals were over (*the case settled during appeal*), I wrote to the judge and thanked him for his formal, yet personal handling of the case. Recently, I learned that the judge was in hospice, which saddened me to hear. However, my spirits were immediately lifted after I was informed that the judge was so inspired by my thank-you note that he not only kept the letter, but had it framed. That was over 35 years ago. This brings me to the focus of the story: you know, that circle thing.

Sometimes, the smallest gestures, the ones no one expects, have the greatest impact on another's life. Little did I know that the qualities that inspired me to write that letter would affect its recipient — and, in turn, me — so many years later. As a law school professor, I see the truth of the old maxim in every class: You learn more from teaching than from being taught.

I think that same sentiment holds true for the work of the Louisiana Bar Foundation in dealing with the recipients of our 70+ grantee organizations. Each act of kindness, of assistance, that we perform or help others to perform for our underserved community comes back to us. It might not be a framed letter of thanks, but a kind word, a smile, or a simple handshake that expresses gratitude for simply "doing our job." What could be more simple or rewarding? After all, isn't that what the practice of law is all about — helping others out of a difficult situation? Let's keep that circle going.