

Lawyers With Artistic Talent

Sixth in a Series

By Heather G. Sowald



Tom Nagel plays his banjo every Thursday night with a jam group, the Original Long Duration Free Association Recreational Therapy Society, OLDFARTS. One night, shortly after the Transportation Security Agency began full body scans, Tom led the group in a parody of the Kingston Trio's classic "Charlie and the MTA" calling it "Charlie and the TSA" or "The Man Who Wouldn't Be Groped." One of the OLDFARTS set up a video camera, and Tom had his first big YouTube hit. After three years his video has almost 900 views!

The OLDFARTS is a large group –varies from 12 to over 20. The core group has been playing together for more than 15 years in a range of music styles from Pachelbel's Canon to Tom Paxton, from Woody Guthrie to Guy Lombardo. No Justin Bieber. The group sits in a circle with a wireless mike for the vocalists, and each player has a turn for choosing the song and the key. Tom started keeping a list of the music they played, but after a few months he gave up – the list was already five pages long. If you want to enjoy good fun and free music, or if you play an instrument and want to find a group, come any Thursday night, 7 to 10, at the Whetstone Gardens Assisted Living Center (a captive audience, he notes) on Olde Olentangy River Road.

Tom grew up with non-musical parents in North College Hill, a suburb of Cincinnati. Both he and his younger brother, Terry, played musical instruments – Tom played the drums and Terry, the trombone. When folk music became big in the 1960s, they decided to pool their money and buy a guitar. But, their Aunt Irma told them to save their money – I have this thing up in the attic you can have." The "thing" in the attic was an elderly lute-bodied mandolin made by Louie Sutz around the turn of the century. Neither Tom nor his brother ever did learn to play guitar. Tom took up the banjo during his law school days and hasn't put it down.

Both brothers got scholarships to OSU and lived in the stadium scholarship dorm. Tom stayed at OSU for law school and deferred active duty in the USAF until his graduation in 1971. The Vietnam War was winding down, so the USAF deployed Tom all the way to Wright Patterson AFB. Or as Tom sees it: "Join the Air Force and see Central Ohio."

About a year later, his JAG services weren't needed, so he and about 700 other surplus lawyers got out of the Air Force early. Tom returned to Columbus and joined a group of solo practitioners for whom he had previously clerked. That group included Jim Britt, Dick Donahey, and George and Tom Twyford. He recalls his first court appearance when he was sent off to domestic relations court with a client and a file folder and told "It's all worked out." The only thing in the file folder was one pink phone message slip.

Subsequently, Joel Campbell, Chet Britt, Jack Graf, and he formed a partnership, and that firm endured in one form or another for about 35 years. Tom is now a solo practitioner, continuing his general practice, doing mostly domestic collaborative law and probate work. He has presented on the topic of collaborative family law at CLE events around Ohio and worked with other probate lawyers to get collaborative law adopted in local probate practice.

When asked for some highlights of his career, my mother, Bea, and I figure prominently! She recruited him to write a chapter in the Sowald and Morganstern Ohio Domestic Relations book, still one of the most difficult things he says he has done as a lawyer. Then, in the late 1990s, I invited him to join the newly created Collaborative Family Law group. To Tom, collaborative domestic relations practice ranks as one of the best things he has ever been involved with professionally. He is sincere when he touts Collaborative Family law to his peers and to divorce clients.

One of Tom's long-time hobbies is flying sailplanes. Radio-controlled sailplaning is the perfect lawyer's sport, Tom jokes. "You have to be good with hot air, and you have to be comfortable spending most of your time going around in circles." Check out www.midohiosoaring.com.

For **Mary Beth Kelleher Fisher**, Being a lawyer was a practical decision. It seemed like a good career choice that would allow her to be her own boss and have career flexibility if she decided to have a family down the road.

In fact, she has been self-employed for the majority of her career as a lawyer, mostly practicing in the area of domestic relations. Mary Beth grew up in Alliance, a small town in northeast Ohio, the fifth of seven children. Most of her family was in some field of medicine (doctor, dentist, nurse, vet), so it was a shock to them when she said she was considering law school. She graduated from Capital University Law School in 1989.

On her first and only blind date, she met her husband. They have been married 20 years, and he, like her father, is a dentist. She and her family all have a love of drawing, painting, photography and crafts and have a designated craft room in their home.

Artistic Talent

Mary Beth became the “mitten lady” a few years ago when trying to think of a way to involve her children in a community service project that would enable them to “give back.”



They decided to participate in the Pelatonia bike ride – 100% of the money earned goes to research at the James Cancer Hospital. To raise funds to sponsor their bike rides, Mary Beth decided to make mittens out

of old wool sweaters, and to use all of the proceeds for the family to enter the bike ride.

First, she had to learn to sew – and she turned to her mother, a talented crafter. Mary Beth, her husband, and their children learned quickly and started working nights and weekends. They let people know about the mittens and a local television station featured her in their Champions for a Cause segment. Mary Beth then, first time ever, created a website for the sale of the mittens, www.gratefulheartdesign.com.

The mittens are sewn from old sweaters. Design (picking out the sweaters and color combination) is exclusively Mary Beth’s job. Once she cuts out the pattern, her husband (although he doesn’t like to admit it) and her mother help with the sewing and embroidering. The children are involved in cutting out the fleece lining that goes inside of the wool mittens and with some of the hand sewing.

Each pair of mittens takes quite a bit of time. Double-stitched for durability and hand sewing to finish each pair. There are a lot of hands involved in this labor of love.

The mitten-making is a productive way for Mary Beth and her family to enjoy an art project with a cause. She says it provides for her some relief from the high stress of domestic relations law, and it is nice to know each pair of these one-of-a-kind mittens is going to someone special, with proceeds all being used for cancer research. She said she never could have

guessed this project would take on “so much meaning for so many others or for me.”

J. Jeffrey McNealey grew up learning woodworking from his father and grandfather, and he has passed it down to his own son. Jeff has his father’s and grandfather’s tools, plus his own additions to the collection. Reflecting multiple generations, he most recently made a mahogany “bow” to support a canvas cover on his new tender for his Catawba Island boat, using wood he inherited from his grandfather, planes and sanders from his father, and a contractor’s saw that he purchased himself.

Jeff designs and builds furniture, as well as various “incidentals,” that assist in domestic life. Some pieces are found in his office at Porter Wright, and some have been given to family. In some instances, Jeff cuts the trees and runs them through a sawmill himself. Preferring hard woods, he selects wood types from the “family inventory” depending on the ultimate use and strength needed for the piece. Color comes into play depending on where the piece is to be used. As Jeff finds inspirational pieces in his travels or in magazines, he takes photographs and rips out magazine pages, storing ideas for future execution. aircraft over his law career. He sold his last plane in 2004, after nearly 5,200 hours as pilot-in-command.

Jeff grew up in the central Ohio, attended Columbus Academy, received his undergraduate degree from Cornell, and then continued on to OSU College of Law. He joined the Porter Stanley law firm (now Porter Wright) in 1969, initiating a career in local and national real estate development. However, his strong interest was in natural resources and environmental law. By the mid-1970s, he was actively practicing and has been nationally ranked in both fields since the 1980s.

Finding the time to indulge in one’s hobbies, he says, is the greatest challenge of anyone’s life. He acknowledges that he has had multiple hobby interests, plus all of his other community commitments. During inclement weather, he finds it easy to work a few hours in the workshop; but with good weather, he can be found out in the parks, on the streams, or on the lakes. In the summertime he also plays men’s doubles casual tennis on Tuesday evenings, with the same group of friends since the mid-1960s.

His future plans entail continuing dreams of finding more time, the first challenge being to clean out and reorganize his workshop, aka “the man cave”! His philosophy is, “Protect your health, stay active, associate with multiple generations – all of which will keep you young enough to find time to do things tomorrow!”

And, as always, if you, or an attorney you know, has a talent in addition to the practice of law – contact me!



hsowald@sowaldlaw.com



*Heather G. Sowald, Sowald Sowald
Anderson Hawley & Johnson*

