
THE PRESIDENT'S COLUMN



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I am excited to be MDLA's president and look forward to serving our organization this year. My earliest memories of the MDLA are attending large gatherings with my father Tom (who served as the MDLA President from 1988-1989) and my mother Mollie for mid-winter at Quadna Mountain in Hill City and the Trial Techniques Seminar (TTS) in Tower Hall at the College of St. Scholastica in Duluth. I remember stories of multi-week trials, cross examinations of experts, camaraderie and lots of laughter.

This year the pandemic cancelled our largest event — TTS in Duluth. While the pandemic may continue to impact our large gatherings, the MDLA still provides us benefits in our smaller, efficient committee meetings. Our organization has 500 of the best civil defense lawyers in Minnesota actively engaged in 19 committees — please join one!

My first committee involvement was MDLA's Diversity Committee. As is often the case, I joined with the intention of giving to our organization and ended up receiving. I received perspective and insight from my MDLA colleagues. My committee involvement challenged me to explore areas that I never would have. For the first time, I read Martin Luther King's "Letter from Birmingham Jail," from 1963, in which he writes:

"I must confess that over the past few years I have been gravely disappointed with the white moderate...who is more devoted to order than to justice; who prefers a negative peace which is the absence of tension to a positive peace which is the presence of justice; who constantly says 'I agree with you in the goal you seek, but I can't agree with your methods of direct action', who paternalistically feels he can set the timetable for another man's freedom, who lives by the myth of time and who constantly advises the Negro to wait until a more convenient season".

Unfortunately, the pandemic hasn't been the only difficult issue we have faced as a state and a Nation. I also watched Minnesota struggle with George Floyd. I watched and listened with my family.

Do you remember the ALS Ice Bucket Challenge on social media? The ALS Ice Bucket Challenge swept the globe in 2014 as millions of people posed and posted pictures on social media of themselves being doused with buckets of ice-cold water.

The George Floyd Challenge imitated the ALS Ice Bucket Challenge. Fortunately, it only included some. Sadly, it included Minnesotans. In the George Floyd Challenge, I saw white, teenage boys from Minnesota kneeling on each other's necks posing and posting pictures on social media. Smiling.

As we watched the images on television and in the newspaper, we started talking about the events as a family, trying to explain to children ages 7 and 9 what we were seeing. It was uncomfortable. We continued talking throughout the summer. Eventually, my 7-year-old said: "when are we going to be done talking about this?" I didn't know the answer.

The moment of silence at the Vikings opening game started the conversation in our house all over again. The kids couldn't understand why everyone wasn't supportive. We continued talking. Again, it was uncomfortable.

During the summer, I didn't know the answer to my 7-year old's question about "when are we going to be done talking about this?" Today, I still don't know the answer.

But re-reading the "Letter from Birmingham Jail", I do know that I need to talk about it with my kids. I can't wait for a "more convenient season" to have the discussion. As your President this year, my hope is that we can have similar conversations as professionals and as people to create equitable outcomes for our clients, our organization and Minnesota.