

Remembering Attorney and Friend John Bomster

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There are days in your life you never forget. Something happens that leaves a permanent mark. Sometimes good, sometimes bad. On October 7, 1979, I met John Bomster, and I'll never forget that day. Nor will I ever forget him. That day made a permanent mark and a good one.

I was a twenty-four year old, second year law student interviewing for a job at Adler Pollock & Sheehan. John was a partner and chaired the litigation department. As a young law student, I thought I knew a lot more than I actually did. I was confident then, as now. (Actually, my mom still says, "I'm not always right, but never in doubt"). So, I told John I wanted to try cases. He asked me: "Well, then, where do you see yourself as a lawyer in the next ten years?" I answered him without hesitation that I expected to be a great trial lawyer in ten years. But, I didn't stop there. I invited him to come along for the ride with me, emphasizing that I hoped he and I would try great cases together. I said all of this with conviction and, I hope, not with arrogance, and I don't believe John took it as arrogant. Rather, I believe, he took it the way I intended. Becoming a great trial lawyer was something I truly wanted. I remember John telling me he liked the fact that I had confidence in myself, and he told me I would need confidence if, in fact, I would ever be a good trial lawyer, let alone a great one. And yes, he said, maybe, if I did join the firm, that someday we would work together and try cases.

Well, I have the honor of saying that for the next 16 years, John and I did work together and we did try cases together and it was an amazing experience. He was a wonderful mentor, a superb attorney (truly a lawyer's lawyer) and, most important, he was a great friend. John was a lawyer of exceptional competence and courage, and a man of true faith. He was principled, ethical and honest. I continued to work

with John for the next 17 years after he retired from AP&S and moved to New Hampshire where he served as Of Counsel to our firm. Over those next 17 years, I worked with John on various matters and on a number of bar committees. But, most significant to me, was whenever I had what seemed to be an insurmountable problem, I could turn to John for advice. John's gift wasn't that he provided the answer or the solution to my problem. Rather, through his disciplined way of thinking and then his challenges and, sometimes, even his cross examinations (and, make no mistake, being cross examined by John was like walking barefoot on broken glass), eventually, he would force me to think through the issues properly and thoroughly. And, just about every time, I'd realize that there was a solution to the problem. John did this for me many times, and I know that he did it for many others in my firm, as well as elsewhere.

When I learned of John's passing, I felt what I can only describe as loss, exceptional loss. I know many of us who knew John felt that loss. I lost my mentor, my colleague and my dear friend. And, I will admit to you, I didn't know quite how to react to the news of his sudden death, but, instinctively, I was compelled to stand silently in John's honor.

Many of John's colleagues and friends and even many of John's legal adversaries spoke to me when they learned of his death, and each felt, in his or her own way, a loss in John's passing. All recognized a great lawyer and a great man had passed.

As I had these discussions, I was reminded of a scene from the movie *To Kill a Mockingbird*. A small town lawyer, Atticus Finch, had defended a black man against a rape charge brought by a white woman in a rural southern town. Of course, with an all male, white jury, Atticus lost the trial. In fact, he had lost the trial before it had even begun. But, as



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you may also remember, when Atticus left the courtroom, supposedly in defeat, all the African American men and women who had been seated in the balcony of the court, stood together to honor him. When Atticus' daughter, Scout, asked why they were doing this, she was told that you stand when a great man is passing.

John Bomster was my Atticus Finch, the epitome of professionalism and courage. And, I know, he was the Atticus Finch for many other lawyers as well. So, John, my friend, take your rest. You always fought the good fight. Be in peace with God. But, John, I do have a small favor to ask. If by chance, when my time comes, if St. Peter should assign you the job of examining my qualifications to enter Heaven, please go easy on me with your cross examination. ♦