



## What a Long, Strange Trip It's Been

**A**s I sit down to write this, my final column as Section Chair, I am thankful that as a country we can finally see some daylight. Although not completely out of the woods, with vaccines in abundant supply and reported cases declining, a gradual return to normalcy is most welcome. Certainly, this was not the year I had anticipated or spent years planning for. That said, while COVID-19 presented its share of problems for our Section, we did what we do best: evolve and adapt. Beyond our tried and true staples, *Family Advocate* and *Family Law Quarterly*, the intellectual anchors of our Section, our Publications Development Board continued to produce practical books critical to the success of the family law practitioner, and our monthly e-Newsletter continued to keep members informed of Section news and the latest developments in family law.

While we unfortunately were unable to meet in person for the first time in our Section's history, we quickly pivoted, doubling down on providing and presenting the information family lawyers needed most. From a COVID resource page to practical presentations by Mark Powers, we made sure that our members had the tools necessary to help them manage their practices and remain economically viable through the pandemic. Recognizing the financial difficulties many of our members were experiencing, we provided more online content than ever before at no or minimal cost. From webinars on business valuations and custody to our first-ever *Family Law Quarterly* Symposium entitled "Family Law During COVID-19: Virtual Hearings, Family Court Proceedings, and the Future" to our incredibly popular brown bag series, produced by the Section's substantive committees, on timely topics ranging from diversity in the profession to online mediation, we did our very best to provide the value you expect and deserve. Very shortly we will be delivering content in yet another way, through podcasts, an exciting new Section initiative. And more is yet to come.

In every sense, our members are the lifeblood of this Section. I want to thank each and every one of you for your efforts this past year and your commitment to the Section and its enduring and continued success, as well as our numerous speakers for providing important and timely content, our Section Officers and Delegates for supporting me with sage guidance and counsel, and our phenomenal Section staff—Cynthia Swan, Danielle Pruger, and Ann Mullen—who worked tirelessly behind the scenes and

without whom this year would not have been a success.

As I reflect upon my time within the Section, I cannot help but think back to my very first meeting. Nervous and excited, I had never traveled anywhere for work, let alone an out-of-state professional conference. It was also my very first time giving a CLE presentation. Having practiced for weeks on end, it was exhilarating to finally be up on stage before so many people and have this opportunity. But even more satisfying was the fact that the person who invited me, Past Chair Jonathan Wolfe, has become one of my closest friends and someone with whom I work and collaborate regularly. In the audience that day was Past Chair Randy Kessler, who gave me the proverbial "pat on the back," welcoming me with open arms and encouraging me to get involved. He has been a friend, mentor, cheerleader, and someone with whom I have had the opportunity to team up on cases involving our respective states for years. The next year, then Section Chair Mitchell Karpf appointed me to serve on my first committee and has been a mentor ever since.

Indeed, what struck me most and what has stayed with me all these years is the warmth and camaraderie I genuinely felt at that meeting in Arizona thirteen years ago. The friends I made at my first meeting and in future meetings remain some of my closest friends today. And in the end, that is the reason why this Section thrives: the interpersonal relationships built and developed over years at meetings we work so hard to make fun, engaging, and informative. Interacting with and learning from colleagues and nationally recognized experts from across the country who are dealing with the same or similar issues. But there are no words to describe those times when things seem at their bleakest and the people with whom you have built and developed these friendships are there for you. There is only gratitude.

It has been a true honor to serve as Section Chair. Rest assured, we are in great hands with incoming Chair Candace Peebles. Candi and I have worked closely this past year to navigate our Section through unprecedented times. Forward thinking and filled with boundless energy, I cannot wait to see what she accomplishes over the next year. I hope you will join us in Orlando October 6–9 for the Section's Fall Meeting! **FA**

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