



Book Review: “Second Acts for Solo and Small Firm Lawyers”

By Michael P. Hurley

When I applied to law school, after taking the LSAT in Long Binh, Vietnam, I was more than ready to give up my job with an artillery unit in the Mekong Delta for a second act. Law school and passing the bar would proceed in the usual order, but I would take a nine-month detour as a vice president of a savings and loan association before heading off to private practice. Forty-five years later, I've practiced law longer than I've done anything in my life, except for being a husband, father, son, and golfer. And I really don't have any immediate plans to change any of that. I'm happy where I am.

When I first met Jennifer J. Rose, former editor-in-chief of GPSolo magazine, in an elevator at the Mayflower Hotel in Washington, D.C., one spring afternoon during Bill Clinton's first term as president, she would be two years away from starting her second act in Mexico, but she was already talking about those plans. Her departure from practicing law in Iowa, her continued involvement in the American Bar Association, and her observations of other lawyers inspired her to create “Second Acts for Solo and Small Firm Lawyers,” published by the American Bar Association Senior Lawyers Division this spring.

Leaving the practice can be a lot more difficult for solo and small firm lawyers, who are used to being their own bosses, who may not have the comfortable retirement plan that their counterparts in large firm and government practice enjoy, and who aren't faced with policies mandating retirement at a certain age. “Just one more year, and then I'll think about getting out” is too often those lawyers' idea of planning ahead. And sadly, many of them wait until some irrevocable path, usually health-related, denies those dedicated lawyers the luxury of a well-orchestrated departure.

Just as lawyers enter the profession at all ages and from a huge range of backgrounds, their departures from practice vary greatly, from plans as carefully executed as your average moon launch to no planning at all, and from bringing on associates to take over the practice to gradually transitioning to part-time practice, often changing the style of their practices along the way. And their reasons for leaving are just as varied.

Solo and small firm lawyers from Hawaii to Long Island, general practitioners as well as those with boutique practices, have shared their perspectives and experiences in this much-needed book filled with brand new material.

What is cognitive decline, and what does it mean for lawyers? Executive Director of the Ohio Lawyers Assistance Program Scott R. Mote, in “How Cognitive Decline Affects Lawyers,” examines the types of cognitive impairment and what it means for lawyers and their clients.

Indiana lawyer Ted A. Waggoner tackles the ethical issues facing the aging lawyer as well as strategies for dealing with the lawyer who refuses to discuss retirement.

Robin Page West was in the throes of closing her Baltimore, Maryland, practice when she wrote a chapter on deciding when it's time to retire, and by the time this book was published, she was living in Austin, Texas, planning her next phase of life.

David Zachary Kaufman, started on his five-year plan for retirement and relocation when he was actively practicing in northern Virginia, moving to Sarasota, Florida, while he wrote the chapter about what worked for him.

Not all lawyers saw their second act as leaving practice. David Leffler transitioned from solo practice in New York City to joining a nontraditional national law firm while moving to Austin, Texas. An Oakland, California, lawyer transitioned from full-time practice to part-time, eventually moving his practice to his home.

Long Island lawyer David Abeshouse discusses how to develop a mediation practice. Wendy Lascher went from decades in a small firm practice to a relatively large firm, picking up her pilot's license along the way. Recovering Dallas divorce lawyer Jimmy Verner opted to become what his wife refers to as a "thumbtack lawyer." Florida lawyer Vicki Levy Eskin took to the road in an RV with her husband, while still running her practice remotely, touching base in person with her office from time to time.

David Hammer went from small firm practice in rural Weaverville, California, to living on a sailboat and teaching sailing, becoming a U.S. Coast Guard Mariner Master. Lakewood, Ohio, lawyer Joan Burda decided to focus on teaching, writing, and pro bono work. Victoria Herring journeyed to her second act as a photographer and art gallery owner in Iowa.

Texas lawyer Craig Stokes takes a hard look at various states bars' approaches to lawyers' status upon retirement. And Honolulu lawyer Marvin Dang explores why lawyers should remain active in bar associations even after retiring.

In "Social Security Benefits for You and Your Family," Avram L. Sacks examines in great detail the minefields of benefits eligibility, the difference between early and full retirement, and working while receiving benefits.

This book rethinks second acts, and it made me think that maybe I really should spend more time travelling and on the greens. If you're a solo or small firm lawyer, and you've already celebrated your 40th birthday, this book is for you.

"Second Acts for Solo and Small Firm Lawyers"

Jennifer J. Rose, Editor

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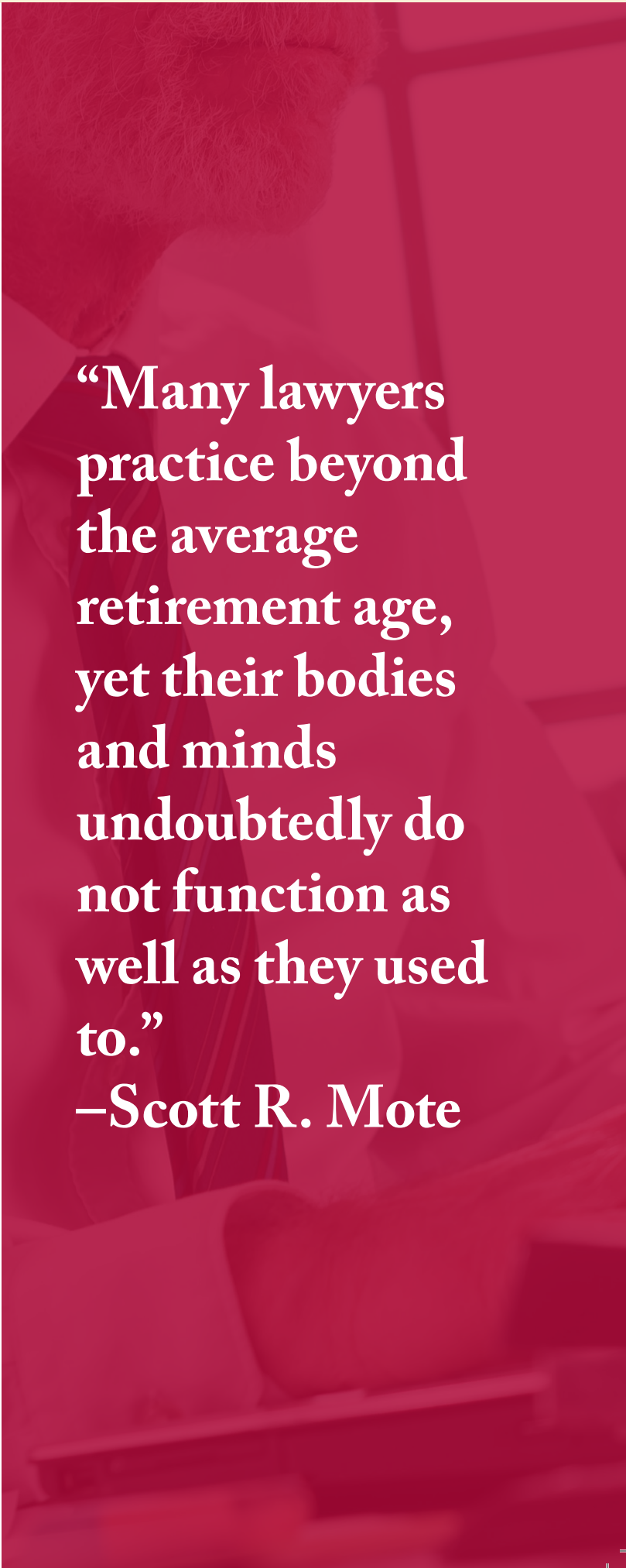
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“Many lawyers practice beyond the average retirement age, yet their bodies and minds undoubtedly do not function as well as they used to.”

—Scott R. Mote