

A Tribute to Nancy Hebble

Nancy Hebble was a longtime member of the Philadelphia Bar Association staff from the early 80s until her retirement in 2001. She oversaw the publications of the Bar Association as Managing Editor and then as Director of Publications.

Nancy Hebble told me the story more than once—the story of how she left Ohio and came to Philadelphia.

Having completed most of her schooling, Nancy was a young adult still living with her family in Columbus when her mother matter-of-factly turned to her one day and said “Nancy, I think it’s time you went out on your own.” So, Nancy made her way to Philadelphia, where she had relatives—an aunt and uncle living in nearby South Jersey.

When we first met in the early 1980s, Nancy was working at the *Legal Intelligencer*, where she honed her editorial skills under the direction of a seasoned pro—an older woman who taught her everything from sentence structure to how to hold and properly use a pair of long-blade office scissors, the type used to clip newspaper columns. And if you improperly used any pair of scissors (or any other instrument, for that matter), Nancy would correct you. The same was true if you misused or mispronounced a word.

Nancy Hebble was exacting. Plus, she had an extraordinary eye not just for detail but for everything else. She was highly discriminating. Along with this, she brought a Midwesterner’s practical, common-sense approach to her work.

When we hired Nancy to oversee the Philadelphia Bar Association’s publications, we must have been looking for precisely that combination of attributes, even if we were not fully aware of it at the time. We were then on the cusp of the greatest period of sustained membership growth (what Nancy and I came to call the “boom-boom” years) in the Association’s history.



It was a breathtaking period—right up until 2001 when Nancy left the Association to put her talents to work elsewhere. If you brought Nancy a manuscript that was giving you trouble, she could quickly pinpoint the problem and correct it for you. If you showed her hundreds of photos from an Association event, she could instantly find and crop the one or two worthy of publication. If you brought her a headline that you thought was perfect, Nancy might brusquely pronounce it awkward and then proceed to improve it.

As former Chancellor Abe Reich remembers: “Nancy was one of a kind; very bright, very direct and quick to judge. But when she blessed a project or written product, you knew you had a winner. I

was fortunate to have her insights during my years as a bar leader.”

Nancy could also see possibilities that others might overlook. Long before yoga was all the rage, former Chancellor Mark Aronchick recalls that Nancy “had the guts and foresight to feature me in yoga class and thereby modernize the image of Bar Chancellor.” Aronchick says “Nancy Hebble was a jewel in a star-studded staff that helped me and our Bar Association accomplish great things during an important time for Philadelphia lawyers.”

David Grunfeld, who served as editor-in-chief of the *Philadelphia Bar Reporter* and later *The Philadelphia Lawyer*, saw Nancy as “the consummate expert at editing articles, laying out issues, choosing graphics and photos, and balancing each issue with substantive and lifestyle material.” And former *Philadelphia Lawyer* editor-in-chief Steve Sher notes that “most, if not all, of the magazine’s awards were under Nancy’s aegis.”

Nancy never married and had no children, so the publications really were her offspring, and she could be quite proprietary about the final product. When the redesigned magazine was introduced with the new moniker *The Philadelphia Lawyer*, the launch party was a full-on Nancy event.

But Nancy’s work was hardly limited to the publications. Former Chancellor Mary Platt was impressed with Nancy’s “dedication to the advancement of women in the legal profession.” She says “Nancy helped launch the Women in the Profession Committee in 1986 and devoted much of her time to serving as the staff member assigned to the Committee.

Though Nancy was hardly the first to arrive at work in the morning, she was often among the last to leave. Consequently . . . Bar leaders knew they could confide in her even after normal business hours. And Nancy didn't hesitate to cultivate her own following.

Nancy worked tirelessly with Committee chairs, Committee members, and other Bar leaders to support the advancement of women lawyers in the legal profession. She also helped the Committee create the Sandra Day O'Connor Award and encouraged active Committee members to chair the Women in the Profession Committee and later become Chancellors and other leaders of our Bar Association."

Though Nancy was hardly the first to arrive at work in the morning, she was often among the last to leave. Consequently (in an era before the widespread use of cell phones), Bar leaders knew they could confide in her even after normal business hours. And Nancy didn't hesitate to cultivate her own following.

Former Chancellor Frank Devine remembers Nancy speaking "softly and gently but bluntly." He says Nancy "had a talent for sizing up people and circumstances," and adds that "almost always, she was right."

Devine reports that Nancy welcomed any new adventure and "could take equal pleasure spending an evening with the orchestra in the Kimmel Center as she could from a fight night at the Blue Horizon, or a Rod Stewart concert at the Spectrum." And he adds that while Nancy "did not always wear a smile, when she did, she lit up the room."

Few knew Nancy better than former Pennsylvania Bar Association President Leslie Miller, who was Nancy's friend for more than 30 years. "Our work together spanned my involvement in both the Philadelphia and Pennsylvania bar associations and the Kimmel Center," Miller explains. "Nancy was a gifted and hardworking professional who set a standard of excellence for herself and all that she did. She had the highest integrity, great good humor, and strong loyalty to those she called friends. I was fortunate to be among those and will treasure the memories of her."

Nancy Hebble and I worked very closely together, logged countless hours, and travelled extensively to professional conferences where we jointly presented

workshops. There were bumps along the way. And, as with any such longstanding professional relationship (particularly in a highly charged creative atmosphere), time and the rigors of the job took their toll. Consequently, after she left the Bar Association, we lost touch. I suppose we needed a breather.

But we reconnected a few years ago and started meeting every so often for lunch. At these sessions, long separated from the stresses and pressures of work, we recalled only the good times. And each lunch became a new and more extended laugh fest.

On one occasion, we reminisced so long and laughed so hard that we hardly noticed we were the last luncheon guests left in one of the city's most popular eateries.

The last time I saw Nancy, she apologized for not looking her best. I brushed that aside as I sensed she was not in the best of health. But she was a very private person, and I dared not pry. We proceeded as normal and the laughs simply continued.

Looking back on it, I'm grateful that I can now remember it all with a smile and a chuckle.

ATTORNEY DISCIPLINARY / ETHICS MATTERS

STATEWIDE PENNSYLVANIA MATTERS

NO CHARGE FOR INITIAL CONSULTATION

Representation, consultation and expert testimony in disciplinary matters and matters involving ethical issues, bar admissions and the Rules of Professional Conduct

James C. Schwartzman, Esq.

- Judge, Court of Judicial Discipline
- Former Chairman, Judicial Conduct Board of Pennsylvania
- Former Chairman, Disciplinary Board of the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania
- Former Chairman, Continuing Legal Education Board of the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania
- Former Chairman, Supreme Court of Pennsylvania Interest on Lawyers Trust Account Board
- Former Federal Prosecutor
- Selected by his peers as one of the top 100 Super Lawyers in Pennsylvania and the top 100 Super Lawyers in Philadelphia
- Named by his peers as *Best Lawyers in America* 2015 Philadelphia Ethics and Professional Responsibility Law "Lawyer of the Year," and in Plaintiffs and Defendants Legal Malpractice Law

1818 Market Street, 29th Floor • Philadelphia, PA 19103 • (215) 751-2863

"Nancyisms"

Make yourself useful. Nancy's oft-repeated admonition from her grandmother. It encapsulated Nancy's approach to life.

Best food in the city. Nancy's description of meals at the Union League where she enjoyed being the guest of members. She liked basic dishes, simply prepared.

Found On the Road Dead. Nancy claimed this is what each letter in the word "Ford" stood for. She was not a fan of Ford vehicles.

Pink or green. Nancy's theory of how faces would print when photographed. Light or sallow complexions were pink; dark or ruddy complexions were green. Nancy insisted she could see the pink or green.

Wait broke the wagon. Another one from Nancy's grandmother. It expressed Nancy's frustration with almost anything that tested her patience.

Lying sack of s - - t. Nancy's dismissive description of anyone she felt deceived her.

Crooked little house. The way Nancy described her home up the hill and on the border between Roxborough and Manayunk. The house was actually two small homes connected to one another. ■

Dan Cirucci, a colleague of Nancy Hebble, served as Associate Executive Director for Communications and Public Affairs at the Philadelphia Bar Association for 28 years.



PHILADELPHIA
BAR ASSOCIATION

WELLNESS BENEFITS



Mindful Mondays

For your mental well-being, the Wellness Committee is now hosting "Mindful Mondays." Every Monday at 8 a.m., Zoom sessions, led by Courtney Schulnick, will guide you through a meditation, followed by optional group sharing and processing. Bring your morning coffee, tea, or breakfast and start your week on the right foot.

REGISTER AT [PHILADELPHIABAR.ORG](https://philadelphiabar.org)

All Your Workouts for \$5

City Fitness Live brings boutique-style studio classes straight into your living room. That's only \$5 a week to access 5 live classes a day and an on demand library of yoga, HIIT, barre, kettlebell workouts, bodyweight and minimal-equipment workouts!

EMAIL MEMBERSHIP@PHILABAR.ORG TO GET STARTED