



A Stolen FISH

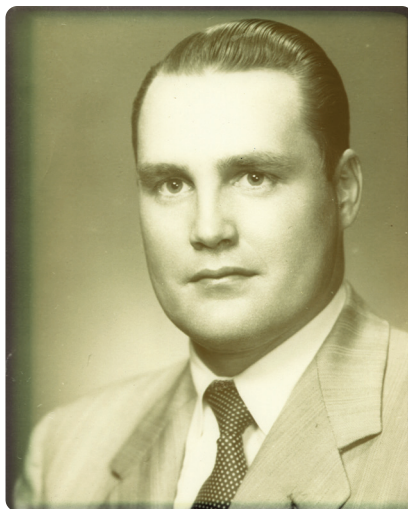
BY W. FLETCHER
MCMURRY SCHROCK

A stolen fish had a part in my becoming a lawyer. As childhood memories go, I have several vivid snapshots in my mind, but the details in between are fuzzy. I was about five years old when it happened. My family lived in a small brick home not far from a sleepy, meandering creek. My seven-year-old brother and I would visit the creek regularly to catch fish. We rarely caught anything. But one day while with a group of kids from the neighborhood, I caught a fish that was larger than any fish ever caught in that stream. That's when an older kid told me the fish had to be thrown back in. Reluctantly, I handed the fish over to him. He was the neighborhood bully.

A moment later, he reeled in the same fish and danced around triumphantly. I did not notice the sleight of hand, when he took my fish and placed it on his hook, only to throw in the fish and "catch" it again. The next memory I have is that bully showing my mother the fish "he" caught. I stood at the bottom of the steps, wanting to cry out, "That's not true! I caught that fish!" It was a wrong that needed to be made right, but I felt powerless. That's my first memory of having a desire to right a wrong: a desire to seek justice.

I believe there is a time in each lawyer's past when that seed is planted. And along the way, that desire for justice is watered by other circumstances and other individuals. Maybe you had a relative or some other person you admired who became a lawyer. You respected them and the profession they chose. You wanted to follow in their footsteps. You wanted to make a difference in society. You wanted to advocate for justice and promote the rule of law as they did. For me, it was my uncle, Paducah lawyer, W. Pelham McMurry. He inspired me. He was the father I never knew. My own father, W.

Fletcher McMurry, III, was killed in Korea in 1952, six months before I was born. He and my uncle, Pelham, were identical twins. Although I never knew my father, I had the opportunity to know my uncle who looked just like my dad.



W. PELHAM MCMURRY
(1925-2000)

Pelham was an overcomer. By his mid 20's his father had died of a heart attack, his brother was killed in Korea and he had contracted polio, causing him to lose use of his right leg. Not deterred, he graduated from law school and began practicing law in Paducah. He went on to serve as County Attorney of McCracken County and eventually County Judge. In 1966, he and Paducah lawyer, Mike Livingston, founded the firm McMurry & Livingston, which still exists today.

Pelham never allowed his physical limitations to prevent him from achieving his goals. He was a true Kentucky Lawyer, a master at the dying art of storytelling. His legal practice was varied as was common in a small town. He cared about his community. He cared about justice. I wanted to be that kind of lawyer, and it keeps me grounded today.

Maybe you've lost sight of why you became a lawyer. Perhaps the struggles along the way, are like that bully in my past. The stress and strain of the practice of law have caused you to question whether you're really making a difference. The obstacles you encounter have stolen the excitement you once had about being a lawyer. If so, it's time to reclaim that inspiration.

THE TRUTH IS NOT ALL LAWYERS ARE CHANGING THE WORLD IN BIG WAYS, BUT EVERY LAWYER HAS THE OPPORTUNITY TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE EVERY DAY. EVERY CLIENT YOU REPRESENT IS AN OPPORTUNITY TO MOVE THE NEEDLE OF JUSTICE IN A POSITIVE DIRECTION.

You have the privilege of walking with the client, guiding them through the legal process, and calming their fears. You have the ability to model justice by following the rules of professional conduct, not because you're afraid of sanctions, but because it's the right thing to do. The civility you show to your staff and fellow lawyers brings dignity to a profession charged with the responsibility to support the rule of law. Even the care you take with a difficult and vulnerable client advances justice. So, if some days in the practice of law you feel like a fish out of water, take a moment to reflect on why you wanted to become a lawyer in the first place. Reframe all those stresses, strains and obstacles as opportunities to get better. Reset your expectations. Rekindle that passion, knowing that you are making a difference every day.