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President's Message: New Hampshire Association for Justice

In the hustle and grind of life in these modern times, it is all too easy to lose perspective on what it is that we do as advocates for the injured, and why it is that we have chosen, and continue to choose, a profession in the law. Most of our days are spent in depositions or on the phone with clients, experts, insurance adjusters, or opposing counsel, as well as reading and replying to a never-ending stream of email and voicemail. For me, it seems that I rarely find the time to reflect on why I became a trial attorney in the first place, to recall what sparked my desire to help those who have been injured to find their way through an increasingly complex legal system.

We all know the importance of the work we do and find it painful when we encounter those who denigrate the legal profession, particularly those of us who represent the interests of injured victims. I was recently at a social gathering when I met someone for the first time and invariably the conversation turned to how each of us earned a living. When I explained what it is I do, I was stunned by this reply: "Oh, you're an ambulance chaser." Of course I politely explained (through gritted teeth) that in fact I help injured victims achieve justice, but the damage was done.

Perhaps you too may have had a similar experience, where someone feels perfectly comfortable challenging your professionalism and the dignity of what you have chosen to do with your life. For me, it was another opportunity to reflect on the choice I made years ago to pursue a career in the law, and also to wonder how it is that so many have come to view trial attorneys in such a negative light.

And so I did what I so often do in such moments; I pulled off my bookshelf a copy of the history of Manchester and the lives of those who worked in the brick mills that still stand along the banks of the Merrimack River, people like my grandfather who immigrated from Quebec with a third-grade education and little more than lint in his pockets. I looked long and hard into the faces of the children in the photographs taken by Lewis Hine, children who worked six days a week in the mills, young girls in dirty and torn dresses, young boys in their knickerbockers, and I couldn't help but wonder what would have become of them had they been grievously injured while working the machines. And I couldn't help but wonder if one of them was a relative of the person who called me an "ambulance chaser," who apparently sympathizes more with the mill owner than the children who should have been in school.

So I closed the book, returned it to the shelf, and slept well that night, knowing that I chose my life's work well. I encourage you, my colleagues, to read of the life of Lewis Hine and to see the photographs that led to the abolition of child labor in the United States. Sometimes a picture does speak a thousand words, and sometimes it's all we need to remind us of the value and importance of our life's work; justice.

Maureen Raiche Manning