

# “From the Chair”

## Column by Honey Kessler Amado

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**Last year** at this time I heard an editorial on National Public Radio, wherein the commentator made the point that few of us can remember what the valedictorian or keynote speakers said at our college graduations. That got me thinking about my graduations – I could not even remember *who* the speakers were at my college graduation, much less *what* they said. The keynote speaker at my law school graduation in 1976 was Elliot Richardson. I don’t remember what he said, other than, having served as United States Attorney General, Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare, Secretary of Defense, Undersecretary of State, Secretary of Commerce, and Ambassador to Great Britain, “I sound like a fellow who can’t keep a job”!

But I do remember the keynote speaker at my niece’s college graduation and I remember what he said. The speaker was Daniel Schorr, the consummate journalist and news analyst for National Public Radio, who exhorted the students to believe in something strongly enough to be willing to go to jail or risk something of value for it. He himself had been threatened with jail for contempt of Congress in 1976 when, as a reporter for CBS, he refused to disclose his source of a report from a Congressional committee investigating the CIA and FBI activities related to Watergate, which report the investigating committee had voted to suppress and which he had published. Mr. Schorr refused disclosure on First Amendment grounds, arguing that to betray a source would “dry up future sources for many future reporters... It would mean betraying myself, my career, and my life.” (The House Ethics Committee ultimately voted 6 to 5 against a contempt citation.)

I regret that I don’t recall what Mr. Richardson had to say, but, of course, Elliot Richardson’s life and his resignation as United States Attorney General speak volumes about believing in something strongly enough to be willing to risk something of value for it. Mr. Richardson resigned as Attorney General when he was ordered by President Nixon to fire the Watergate Special Prosecutor, Archibald Cox, who was insisting that Mr. Nixon turn over incriminating audiotapes to him. Rather than fire Mr. Cox, Mr. Richardson resigned.

In the execution of our responsibilities as attorneys and members of a free citizenry, there must be things we believe in strongly enough to risk the consequences of taking a

stand. Perhaps the consequences are not as dramatic as going to jail or resigning a position. Maybe the risks are earning less money, being declined for appointment or advancement, being subject to public criticism, being out on a limb alone. There must be lines we draw in our advocacy, over which we do not cross. We must have sufficient regard for the Law and the judicial process – and ourselves – that we eschew strategies which include tactics such as misrepresentations, obfuscation, and abuse of process. There must be lines we draw over which we do not allow our government to cross, such that we speak out whether or not our position is popular.

The flip side of having no lines is a diminution of self, for lines define us as individuals and ultimately define us as a society. Lines and our response to them are our legacies. We must each consider carefully what legacy we want to leave.

This is the last of my *From the Chair* columns for *Los Angeles Lawyer*. I thank our excellent and creative Editor, Samuel Lipsman, for giving me the license to write about anything I wanted in the column and for supporting me when I did. I delight in calling him friend. I thank our Assistant Editor, Lauren Milicov Jomie, for her skill, insights, and good humor, as we worked together – always past deadline – to finalize the columns. And I thank members of the Editorial Board for their hard work and commitment to *LA Lawyer* and for making my year as chair so enjoyable.

Your thoughts, ideas, and concerns regarding this magazine are welcome. You can reach me through the Los Angeles Lawyer magazine offices (213/896-6503) or at my e-mail [HoneyAmado2@gmail.com](mailto:HoneyAmado2@gmail.com).

I hope Los Angeles Lawyer is and continues to be a valuable tool to you in executing your duties as one able and entrusted to advocate in our government of law.

Honey Kessler Amado's professional website is archived and may be accessed at [AmadoLaw.com](http://AmadoLaw.com).