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My Journey to the YLS Chair: From the *Amistad* to the Quinnipiack Club

By Lawrence F. Morizio, YLS Chair

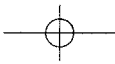
Hello there! I am the incoming chair of the Young Lawyers Section for the 2008–2009 Bar year. My goal is to use this forum to inform our members of the important issues that concern the Young Lawyers Section and provide you with an account of our programs and events taking place throughout the year. In the meantime, I will provide a short story about my journey....

I was sitting on a boat in the Long Island Sound at the end of my first year as a “young lawyer” at around the turn of the century. But this wasn’t just any boat—this was the *Amistad*. The *Freedom Schooner* was docked in New Haven and loaded with many young lawyers celebrating the end of our Bar year before pushing out to sea. Most of us were prepared for nice May sunshine and some food and drink in recognition of our leadership skills and program-

ming successes as Executive Committee members of the Young Lawyers Section. Within a few minutes, our expectations began to unravel. First, an ominous and incrementally thickening fog rolled right over the vessel, followed by a bothersome drizzle, forcing us below deck. Once we descended into the bowels of the ship, we were advised by the crew that the chef was not present for this trip. And furthermore, not a morsel of food or drink was to be found. It was at this moment when I reached inside myself and asked, “Why am I here?” It was not until this year, about a decade later at our section’s annual Diversity Reception, that I firmly grasped the answer to that question.

It started innocently enough. An experienced defense attorney and former co-chair of the YLS Workers’ Compensation Committee advised me that a vacancy as co-chair existed for this position because the

committee was inactive for quite a few years. I got in touch with the incoming chair of the Young Lawyers Section who had this familiar ringing last name—Ralph Monaco. Afterwards, I received an invitation to attend the YLS Retreat as co-chair of the Workers’ Compensation Committee. At the retreat—an intensive day to learn the “how-to’s” of programming and the inner-workings of the section—it was easy to see that our chair was a skilled communicator. His message and the tone he delivered it in was what impressed me. He was so inspirational that my co-chair (I vaguely remember that his name was Greg) and I were excited enough to prepare two programs that year. We put our ideas in writing called a “Plan of Action.” The first item listed in our plan was a seminar on the nuts and bolts of the Workers’ Compensation Commission for young lawyers. The second plan was a publicity crazed “Rock and Jock”



genre softball game to be played for charity between claimant and respondent attorneys. By the end of the year, our plans did not result in much action. The seminar was cancelled because of lack of attendees and the softball game was stalled due to "insurance" issues. At this point in my "young lawyer" career, that same question crept up into my consciousness. I felt the waves of the *Amistad* in my belly. I was hungry. "Why am I here?" I was somehow invited back the next year to probe the question further.

Once I figured out what I was doing, I carried my co-chair and the Workers' Compensation Committee to the promised land. We hit the programming jackpot in my second year. We put on two continuing legal education (CLE) seminars that fostered discussion of medical and legal issues important to our area of law. We also organized a couple of "informal" events to include a "Meet the New Workers' Compensation Commissioners" evening and a casual lunch with the chairman of the Workers' Compensation Commission to talk about expectations for young lawyers entering the profession. Before we could blink, we were in somebody's backyard enjoying an end of the Bar year barbeque. We were also blessed to receive some sort of "Star of the Year" diploma honoring our accomplishments. That was nice. But now I had a wife and baby girl waiting at home for me. Plus, my legal career was in high gear. I had more partners at my firm looking for me and even more cases than I could handle. Even though the process was rewarding, I couldn't afford to be spending time putting on these programs. The fog was creeping back in. The barbeque satisfied some of my hunger. But I still had to ask, "Why am I here?"

I had my doubts as to whether I could provide leadership to other young lawyers. I worked in a relatively small firm as a claimant/plaintiff lawyer. I had to spend time bringing in business, attending hearings, settling cases. Most of the attorneys involved in the Young Lawyers Section were "big firm" lawyers whose firms encouraged participation at this level. Fortuitously, my firm was supportive of my venture. I was eventually "invited" to be a director of the section. My role was to teach the basics of programming to the incoming Executive Committee members and to assure them that they had the energy and

effort within them to get the job done. It was empowering. I watched in awe as CLE seminars thrived throughout our substantive committees, diversity initiatives were advanced, public interest groups scheduled drives for the troops, and speakers of the greatest legal ilk were sitting next to me at organized luncheons—all put together by the hands of young, energetic lawyers within the section. But what else could I do to contribute? I wasn't getting any younger, and I was now a partner—with three kids!!! Despite these pressures, I was in pretty deep. I knew at this point what I had to do. The mist started to dissipate and there was always a protein bar I could grab at the gas station. The question wasn't yet answered in full, but I had an outline.

It wasn't until this year that I could tell you for sure. I was sitting next to State's Attorney Gail Hardy at the Quinnipiack Club in New Haven. She, along with Yale University's Dean Harold Koh, were pre-

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sented with the Young Lawyers Section Diversity Award at the Third Annual Reception that evening. I spoke with her at length and she was thrilled to receive this award. In her remarks, State's Attorney Hardy referenced portions of her journey and how she succeeded as a counselor and a leader. She also discussed how she overcame great odds as a woman and an African American to achieve a position no other female attorney has in this state. After her shared words, State's Attorney Hardy sat down next to me and lost her stellar smile for a few seconds and said, "I forgot to tell them that I am always committed to being the best attorney that I can be." At that moment I got it and I was thankful—thank-

ful that our section recognized this person and the persons before her for this award; thankful that we were committed to special projects involving diversity, public interest, pro bono, and balancing work and life; thankful for the leaders of the group before me who put in the time despite external pressures to transform these plans of action into reality.

I drove home that night from the reception and from the highway I glanced down at the harbor. The lights were shining on that little schooner—*Amistad*. It was the symbol in the movement to abolish slavery after the revolt on board by African captives in 1839. The abolitionist movement exploded onto the scene and there was a commitment to get rid of slavery all the way to the United States Supreme Court. You can look up the legalities on Casemaker[®] free of charge. For me, it's also the answer to an important personal question. The lesson is rooted in the following quote:

*Until one is committed, there is hesitancy, the chance to draw back, always ineffectiveness. Concerning all acts of initiative (and creation) there is one elementary truth, the ignorance of which kills countless ideas and splendid plans: that the moment one definitely commits oneself, then Providence moves too. All sorts of things occur to help one that would never otherwise have occurred. A whole stream of events issues from the decision, raising in one's favour all manner of unforeseen incidents and meetings and material assistance, which no man could have dreamed would have come his way. I have learned a deep respect for one of Goethe's couplets: **Whatever you can do, or dream you can, begin it. Boldness has genius, power and magic in it.***

I have come a long way since my visit to the *Amistad* and the sky is clear for me now. I am here because I am committed as a lawyer to have our profession regarded as the most noble of all professions. Participating in the Young Lawyers Section of the Connecticut Bar Association is a certain means to that end. I encourage you to participate in the events and programs of our section and I look forward to serving you this year. CL

