

ODE TO JOE

When I began my time with TLR, the organization had recently received a mild scolding from a venerated legal-writing guru who was reputedly unhappy about the inconsistent hyphenation of compound nouns and phrasal adjectives. To make amends, the Ed Board had invited said legal-writing guru to speak to the current TLR membership. New members were “voluntold” to attend. The appointed time for this command performance was a Saturday morning, 8:00 AM. Much to the chagrin of me and others similarly situated, when we entered the old Sheffield Room, there were no breakfast tacos in sight. There wasn’t even coffee.

What?! Saturday morning and no coffee? Clearly, cruel and unusual punishment.

Refusing to despair, I joined forces with one of my new compatriots, whose name I will withhold seeing as he is now a federal district judge. He and I decided to take some initiative and try to remedy the caffeine-deprivation problem. We retreated to the Sheffield Room’s attached kitchen where we found a large coffee urn, coffee grounds, and an industrial-sized coffeemaker. But no filters.

Being enterprising souls worthy of TLR membership, we quickly assessed the situation and decided that some paper towels would do the trick. Whispering to each other to ensure we did not disrupt the venerated legal-writing guru’s lecture, which had already begun, we set in motion the making of coffee, a feat that we were sure would mean being greeted as liberators.

Back in the Sheffield Room itself, we listened to the venerated legal-writing guru explain the basis for his recent distress regarding TLR’s editorial misfeasance. After a reasonable interval, we then slipped back into the kitchenette to see how the coffee was coming along.

Alas, what we found instead of coffee was a muddy river of grounds spewing all over the counter and onto the floor. Somehow, our jerry-rigged operation had gone terribly awry. Worse still, we both became seized with the kind of giggles generally associated with 12-year-olds confined to church on a spring morning. Not only had we failed in our mission, but at our very first TLR gathering, we seemed poised for banishment.

Fast forward three years. The very month that I began practicing law at a very nice law firm founded by a former TLR EiC, I, along with the other new associates, were “voluntold” to attend a Saturday seminar, to be conducted by the very same venerated legal-writing guru. Ugh, I thought. Here we go again. Fortunately, when I dragged myself into the office, there was plenty of coffee. And much to my surprise, instead of voicing what had once felt like insufferable pedantry, this venerated legal-writing guru offered up numerous insights and witticisms (along with free copies of his useful treatise on persuasive legal writing). Perhaps, my time with the TLR had irrevocably altered my perspective. Or, perhaps, it was the venerated coffee.

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