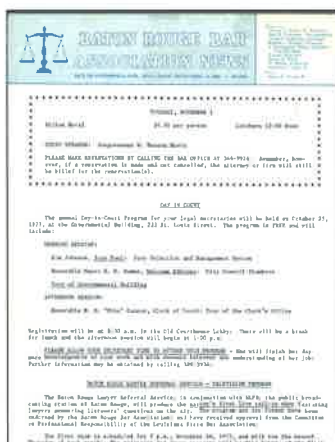


# Transitions

So it was September 1985. I was 38 years old (you can do the math) when our new Executive Director, Bobbi Zaunbrecher, decided we needed to change from our monthly “Newsletter” (one page – back and front) to a magazine. It was a brilliant idea. The Newsletter used to look like this:



She asked for volunteers. I volunteered. Apparently no one else did, so I instantly became the Editor.

We needed a name for the publication. I wanted to call it “The Batture” – you know, with our proximity right next to the river and our French legal heritage, and all – but Jim Toups was the BRBA President and he named it *Around the Bar*. Rank has its privileges.

Our first masthead was in November 1985. I was listed as “Assignments Editor.” In April 1986 the masthead promoted me to Editor. Mr. Steve Riedlinger (later to be Judge Riedlinger) was listed as “Assistant Editor.” (We misspelled it “Reidlinger.”) Our “Editorial Staff” included Vince Fornias and Art Vingiello, who are both STILL on the Editorial Board.

Through the years we added a few notable wordsmiths: Jeff Wittenbrink joined in 1987. He did an interview with Judge Lou Daniel and never turned it in, probably in the 90s, but we still harang him about it at almost every meeting to this day. John Fenner has been on and off since 1998. We added Rebecca Wisbar in 1994. John McLindon, who is famous for his international vacation photo spread on the “Graves of Famous People,” joined up in 2004. And, of course, Gail Stephenson, since 1989. Gail does much of the heavy lifting and wears the most hats.

Also there were a few who came for a while, like Amy Counce, Robert Collins, Marshall Grodner, Glenn Marcel, Michelle Finnegan, Fred Kroenke, Chandler Loupe (who

was gonna do a food column and never did), Jimmy Burland, Jack Whitehead, Greg Gouner, Esteban Herrera, Rachel Emanuel and Gracella Simmons.

We now have Joe Cefalu as Editor in Chief and John Fenner as Managing Editor. Also Grant Guillot, Dianne Irvine, Mary Roper, Dale Lee, the two Katherines: Dampf and Dufresne, and our newbies Mark Assad A.J. Sabine and Justin Jack. If I left you out, it was not an error of the heart.

I tried to get out of this job four times: On the editorial page of the issues celebrating our 10th anniversary, 20th anniversary, 25th anniversary and 30th anniversary, I asked that if anyone wanted this job, to please apply. Crickets. (I finally succeeded.) It’s been a great run. A labor of love and a lot of fun.

Here are a few tidbits:

In the beginning our cover was usually a cartoon drawn by some art teacher we paid \$50, like this one:



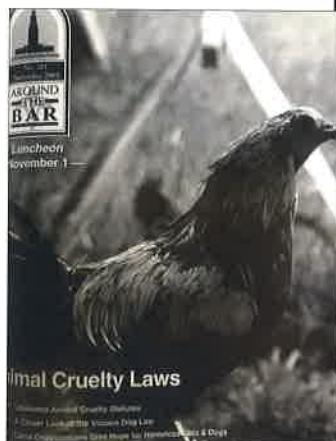
Then we used black and white photographs. One of my favorites:

Our most controversial cover: We had an issue in 2003 with articles about the burgeoning lawyer advertising. "Has Lawyer Advertising Gone Too Far?" We had a urinal on the cover with graffiti stating "... for a good lawyer call 555-1212."



Our worst cover: Editorial Board in the graveyard (Estate Planning Issue).

First full-color cover: September 1991:



Two (of many) covers Gail did not like are the Chicken cover (Animal Cruelty Laws):

The Termite cover (Real Estate and the Law):



We loved the color covers. One of my favorites was this one.



The issue was who gets custody of the dog in the divorce. (Actually, I recall that the two lawyers on the cover actually DID end up getting a divorce. (I could be wrong. It was a long time ago. September 2009. Wonder who got the beagle.)

Our secret: For quite a long period of time, we interviewed older members of the bar to get their sage advice. Problem: Every older lawyer we interviewed died shortly after the issue came out. Pretty creepy. At our meetings someone would invariably say, "Who we gonna kill this month?" Needless to say, we never told anyone about this or we'd never be able to interview anybody.

We didn't have many (or any) rules. One rule that was inviolate was this: We print. We do not reprint.

Don't get me started on the Oxford Comma.

We rarely reject high-quality, well-written articles. One exception was an article entitled "Dog Leg Right" by Vince Fornias, which we rejected. That's all I'm gonna say about it. Talk to Vince.

We try our best not to present one side of a controversial issue. If we do, we try to do it in a point-counterpoint format.

We also have an unwritten policy that sounds like this:

Member: How about an article about new legislation affecting the Code of Civil Procedure?

Another Member: "That's a great article idea. Who can we get to write it?"

Editor: "Who didn't show up for this meeting?"

Problem solved.

Our biggest mistake: Judges survey. In 2001 we did a survey of the membership asking them how they felt about our judges in various areas: work ethic, fairness, accessibility, attitudes in court. Well, we printed the results and the judges hated it, of course, but *The Advocate* loved it and republished it . . . even the comments section where our members got to anonymously vent against the judges. We never did THAT again and the idea never again reared its ugly head.



**Pet Peeve:** People who join the Editorial Board, never attend a meeting, but put it on their résumé. (Not many of these, but a few, and you know who you are.)

**One gripe:** Our profession buys more expensive cars, houses and jewelry than most any other profession. We still have trouble getting advertisers because of the advertising agency gatekeepers who say our circulation numbers are too low. If you know anyone who makes a LOT of money off of us, please ask them to advertise in *The Baton Rouge Lawyer*.

**Awards:** The publication has received two national Luminary Awards from the National Association of Bar Executives. First, it received a honorable mention in 2001 for excellence in regular publications. This year, it was awarded first place for its excellence in graphic design.

We finished 340 issues.

So where do we go from here? *Around the Bar* is now *The Baton Rouge Lawyer* (the name suggested by Darrel Papillion to reinforce who we are and how we practice here.). Still no *Batture*.

In 1995 and 2003, the BRBA did a survey of its members. The survey revealed that 99% of our members read 46%

of *Around the Bar* within the first week of the magazine landing on their desks. I wonder what they would say today. There was a movement a few years ago to go digital only. I opposed it then and still oppose it . . . for now.

The print world is changing dramatically. I subscribe to many newspapers and magazines, all of which I read digitally. I guess the time will come.

The time has come, however, for some new blood. I am excited about handing the reins over to Joe Cefalu and John Fenner. I will remain on the Publications Committee. I was told by John Fenner (at my last meeting as Editor) that he can't WAIT to assign me an article . . . and warned me not to miss any meetings. I won't.

I want to thank Ann and the Board of Directors for their support through the years, even though SOME members of the Board thought our magazine cost too much money . . . and you know who you are.

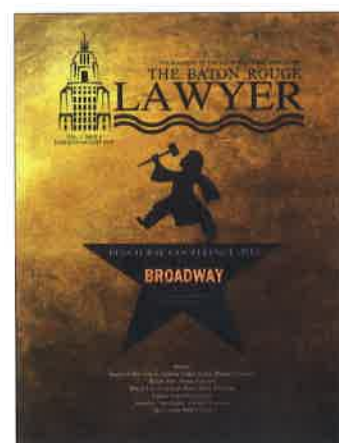
I want to thank our Publications Coordinator of 18 years, Pam Labbe. She REALLY did the heavy lifting and made sure the trains ran on time.

I want to thank our new Publication Coordinator, Landon Hester, who is doing a great job for us. Check out this cool cover he dreamed up:

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I hope to be here for the next 340 issues, but just as a Publications Committee member, albeit an influential one, I hope. ■



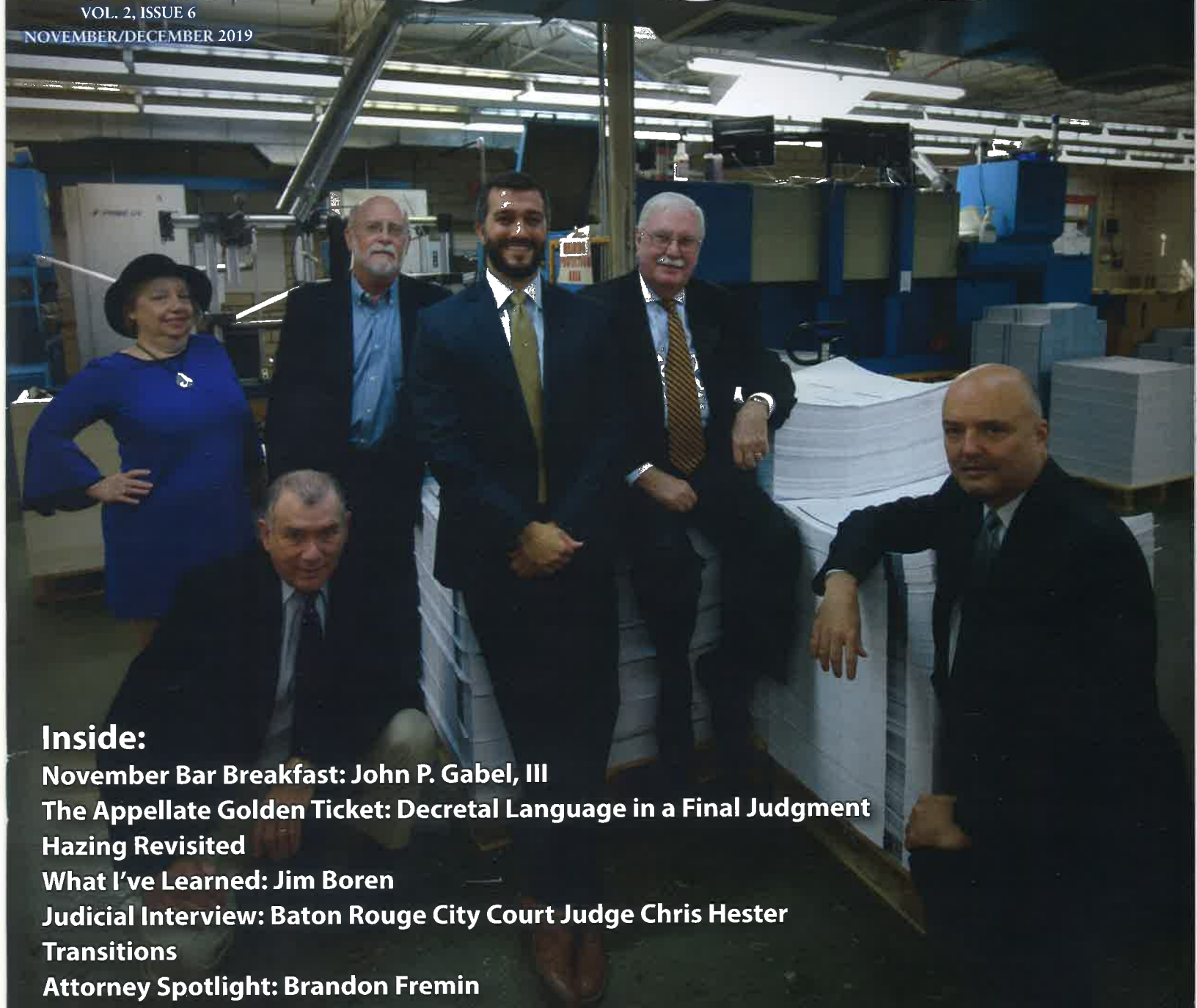
WRITTEN BY EDWARD J. WALTERS, JR.



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# THE BATON ROUGE LAWYER



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## **Thank You Ed Walters for 34 Years of Service**