



MEET TLC'S NEW PRESIDENT, JOHN SLOAN '98

— Ken Levinson, Aug '08, 7-Step Grad —

Since the establishment of the Trial Lawyer's College in 1994, three people have served as President of the venerable Wyoming-based school: Gerry Spence, legendary trial lawyer and TLC founder; Jude Basile, "One of America's finest" according to Spence; and now John Sloan, a 1998 TLC graduate and Texas-based attorney who described his recent election as a "humbling, but daunting moment".

In a letter addressed to fellow Warriors in January, Sloan didn't mince words: "I have some big shoes to fill," he said, referencing Spence and Basile. "I am afraid I'm not up to the task."

Seemingly strange for someone who's been selected a "Texas Super Lawyer" by Texas Monthly magazine every year since 2003, and boasting a national trial practice that spans 13 different states.

Sloan continued in his letter: "It is difficult for me to really comprehend the enormity of Gerry's gifts to me and to all of us. Imagine that you are the most famous lawyer in the United States. You are pulled in every direction by those who seek your time and attention. You, however, chose to say 'no.' You chose to give to others."

Thousands of students have graced Spence's College over its 20-year history, learning methods that the local icon deemed integral to protecting the so-called "little guy." In 20 years, Gerry has created a community of like-minded individuals who prioritize the needs of others as opposed to themselves. It's a message that resonates with fellow Warriors around the country, promoting principles of awareness, diligence, and selflessness. The TLC methods have proven successful for alums and, more importantly, the clients they represent. That legacy casts a wide shadow over a domain that has become one of Spence's most enduring professional achievements. And John Sloan now finds himself at the helm of that achievement, during a critical

juncture of the school's evolution. The big question facing John is: How do we adapt to the future while preserving Gerry's enormous contributions and irreplaceable presence?

And while the question may be overwhelming, it's John Sloan's humility that perhaps makes him the ideal leader during TLC's latest chapter, one that will see an expanded curriculum, more local and national outreach, and ideally the establishment of a new library.

I was asked by the Warrior Editorial Board to interview President Sloan for an article in this 20th Birthday commemorative issue in order to provide an opportunity for this tribe to gain insight into our school's current leader. Truthfully, I felt intimidated. My personal history with TLC remains relatively new, ever since my first seminar in 2005. John, by contrast, graduated from TLC in 1998, just four years after the school's founding. He has an extensive resume and numerous professional achievements. But mostly, I was anxious and nervous about what we might discuss, especially with regards to Gerry Spence and his ongoing role, and that of John, as the College moves forward. The responsibility I felt to provide this insight into our leadership to fellow TLC alumni felt enormous.

What I learned is that John Sloan is a modest, generous person concerned with the well-being of others. He's a person with tremendous admiration and respect for Gerry Spence and the Trial Lawyer's College. And most importantly, though, I learned that John is a person with a vision.

Like my direct examinations at trial, any missing facts and issues are clearly the fault of the questioner. Below is our conversation. We jumped in head first.

Ken: Let me touch on something people maybe think about

but don't want to talk about. What happens down the road? Hopefully it's many years down the road, when Gerry is not as active, or even worse, not around at all. How do you see The College changing or running without Gerry's overwhelming aura and amazing presence?

John: When we lose Gerry, it will be a huge loss. But he continues to prepare TLC for that eventuality. He does not duck the issue. It's a question that he embraced from the day we first set foot on The Ranch as he continues to work to teach us, through self-discovery, about the absolute need to find the power that comes from being real, from knowing ourselves, and from finding our own voice. Gerry's attendance continues to enhance each of our events with his wisdom and experience and kindness. That is something we will never be able to replace. But in his humility, he has provided us methods that aren't unique to him, and that set us apart from every other CLE program, and these methods will long out-live Gerry Spence. I see part of my responsibility is to ensure that The College stays loyal to these methods, rooted in psychodrama, and that we continue to always get better in teaching and applying our methods—starting with the board and permeating every facet of this organization.

Ken: Speaking of that, how do you see The College's teaching methods changing over the next 20 years?

John: We've now developed important criteria to help our teaching staff, now and in the future, to improve their abilities as teachers. This is something that we have spent a lot of time discussing at a recent board meeting. We wanted to come up with ideas and methods for improving our faculty's ability to teach AND to run a small group, ensuring they connect with people on a more personal level. This small group could be an F Warrior-led Local Working Group, a group of folks at a law office, a small working group at a Regional Seminar or at one of the three-week colleges—or a jury. As we developed this criteria, we tried to examine and look at things that help our faculty to become better communicators. Improving our faculty and the ways they are trained was a request from Gerry and I think this new criteria is an important first step. It includes ensuring our faculty knows and understands the psychodramatic methods; have proven that they can apply these methods with ease to every phase of the trial; and that the faculty member is committed to knowing how to listen and in turn teach our students about how to use the methods. It's a tall order, for sure.

Ken: What are some examples of other things you'd like to implement in

the coming years to improve TLC?

John: In the past, we've taught a four-day seminar called "Psychodrama for Lawyers," which consisted solely of personal psychodrama. We have now decided to improve and expand the curriculum of that program to also include teaching directing skills. We are also going to offer a new week-long program that will focus on psychodrama and teaching group leadership skills. I've asked one of our Psychodramatists, Don Clarkson, to work with others of his choosing to develop the curriculum for both of these new Seminars at The Ranch. The expanded "Psychodrama for Lawyers and Directing skills" will be open to all students; the week-long program of personal psychodrama and teaching group leadership skills will be a new Grad program. It is very important to continue to provide curriculum for our graduates that builds on what they learned at the three-week program, but prepares them even more for their battles in the courtroom.

Ken: So that's two new programs—one for all students and one for graduates of the college's three-week program?

John: That's right, the expanded "Psychodrama for Lawyers" will be open to all students of TLC and will teach personal psychodrama as well as directing skills. The new week-long program to teach personal psychodrama and group leadership skills will be available only to graduates of the three-week college or the equivalent seven-step program. Both will be held at The Ranch.

Ken: So if we look ahead, do you see certain things that are in addition to psychodrama that will be core elements to the teaching methods at The College?

John: Psychodrama is and will continue to be the basis of what we do and who we are. It sets us apart from every other Continuing Legal Education program for lawyers. Another unique feature of our teaching is that we have people who serve as faculty for our programs whose only motivation is to help other trial lawyers become better advocates. Period. They serve simply to "pay-it-forward" and give to others the gifts that they have already received. That is incredibly unique, and they do it



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for free—without any pay from us. That is incredibly powerful, if you think about it, and I will work to ensure that continues on. An important feature of our teaching methods that sets us apart from other programs is that they are taught by us—trial lawyers. As members of this tribe, we are unashamedly and unabashedly "trial lawyers." It's who we are. It's what we do. That won't ever change because if it does, we give up on believing in the jury system in this country and as TLC's President, I simply will not

allow us to give that up. We are trial lawyers, and we educate other trial lawyers in methods based and rooted in psychodrama. We can grow, we can expand, but we will not leave our proven foundation of success.

Ken: So, do I hear you saying that we have a commitment from you, as you sit here today, that we will not take out the term 'trial lawyers' from our name?

John: Absolutely. We're trial lawyers, and we'll always be the Gerry Spence Trial Lawyer's College as long as I'm in a position to have any influence. I'm proud to be a trial lawyer. I'm proud that we have more than 1,450 Trial Lawyer's College graduates, and that interest and attendance in our programs is higher today than any time in our past. We are growing, and I want to continue that growth, as does Gerry.

Ken: Is there anything specific regarding the TLC methods, apart from the teaching, that might change?

John: When The College was first established, psychodrama was a course in self-discovery. We wanted people to discover who they were, so that we could, as Gerry says, know ourselves, our clients, our jurors, the judge and whomever might be involved in our trials. As we evolved, psychodrama became a way to discover the story and emotion of our cases. It's been utilized and it's been improved as a tool. It's at the core of our teaching. Little things may change, but the overall goal of learning and applying the psychodramatic methods to our trials is still the same for our students.

Ken: Since you've been involved with The College, you've interacted with, literally, hundreds of students. Do you see things changing in terms of who we teach and what our students look like?

John: Over the last several years, I've looked at hundreds—maybe thousands—of applications. One of our goals continues to be to diversify practice type, geography, race and gender. We constantly work to continue to attract a multitude of students with different backgrounds and perspectives at the Trial Lawyer's College. And we're making progress. This year we have taught more women students—approximately 28% of our student body—than any year before. It's incremental success, but it is trending in the right direction. We are also increasing our numbers of students from diverse cultural and racial backgrounds. Under my leadership, that effort won't ever change. Another one of the things that I'm pleased to lead is to provide programs with a greater emphasis on criminal law. We'll never abandon our commitment to the civil lawyer, but perhaps from time to

time in the past, some criminal lawyers have been left out. We have told them that the method is the same whether you practice criminal law or civil law, and while that's true, I believe our programs have been slanted towards court-room application for the civil lawyer. I want to expand the educational opportunities for criminal lawyers at the Trial Lawyer's College and the first step in doing this is to expand the curriculum of our Death Penalty Seminar to one that is a "Criminal Defense Seminar." After 14 years of an exclusive focus on fighting the death penalty and training mitigation lawyers to fight better during the penalty phase of those cases, we have assessed what is happening across America: there were 80 new death sentences handed down in 2013, and **over 160,000 life sentences** handed down—over a third of which were "life without parole." At the Trial Lawyer's College, we have not focused enough on teaching these criminal lawyers and addressing their needs to be more successful for their clients. Next Spring, we will have our first seminar solely for Criminal Defense lawyers and I'm very proud of that. I hope that this helps this group of lawyers, and also continues to place TLC at the cutting edge of leading essential training in the evolving justice system in this country.

Ken: Wow...will that be in addition to the Death Penalty Seminar?

John: This new program will become an evolution for the Death Penalty Seminar, although we plan to continue to offer training for fighting the death penalty and mitigation efforts during the penalty phase of death penalty cases as a part of this broader training for Criminal Defense lawyers. There are daunting challenges in the areas of criminal trials, prosecutions and especially sentencing—separate and apart from the ultimate issues presented in capital cases. We are leading the world in incarceration—and for long sentences. TLC must be on the cutting edge of addressing that justice need.

Ken: That is very exciting. I look forward to being a part of that. Can we switch gears now from curriculum and talk about other changes that you see happening under your leadership of the Trial Lawyer's College?

John: Well, one thing we've been discussing is developing a

Trial Lawyer's College Library which we're very excited about.

Ken: At The Ranch?

John: Yes, at The Ranch. Imaging Spence has been very involved. She's been helping with conceptual drawings and ideas for what it may look like and what it could include. Imaging is an incredibly talented designer and decorator and we've seen some concept drawings



that, at this point, are incredible. It will be a credit to Gerry and an asset to The College as we teach long into the future, always remembering that the success of our methods are rooted in the psychodramatic techniques and skills that Gerry has taught us.

Ken: So will this Library include books, articles and transcripts that Gerry and other Warriors can share using our methods?

John: Yes, all the things you just mentioned, including a searchable, digital archive of all of the teaching demonstrations in the Big Barn and at some Regionals since 1994. That digitizing effort is already complete and it is an incredible gold-mine of historical teachings that we will continue to be able to rely on. Now we're researching software that will make all those demonstrations "key-word" searchable. Think of it: it would be an incredible thing for someone to be able to go to the Library and research Gerry Spence in all aspects of trial preparation and delivery that he's taught! We are also considering additional classroom space in an effort to make this a year-round campus. We won't replace The Big Barn, or the classrooms in the John Johnson Barn or The Milk Barn/Trine's Place, we'll just supplement them with winterized meeting space.

Ken: Is there a completion time frame?

John: Not right now. We've seen some preliminary drawings and we've had meetings to talk about funding the project while preserving the mission of The College. There have been refined drawings. That may be one of the things we present at the F Warrior meeting in November.

Ken: I hear many TLC graduates who continue to ask themselves, 'How can I help? I want to be a part of TLC's growth and contribute to its mission...' whether it be the Library or some other facet of The College. What would you say to them?

John: Come on—we need your help! Being of help and service is the nature of our people, and that's one of the things we talked about at the last Board meeting: *'How do we find a place for everyone who wants to be involved?'* There are lots of people who want to be involved but don't yet feel like they have the opportunity—that there is no supportive slot for them. There is a powerful demand there. I want to make sure that we broaden the

scope of opportunities to meet the demand. What's wonderful is that we have the manpower to do even more incredible things—we just need to create the opportunities and be open to the new possibilities that will come with all the help.

Ken: With so many things happening at The College right now, what would you tell people who want to be involved now?

John: I would encourage our warriors to give serious thought and consideration

to the areas where their unique talents lie. We're not all teachers. Assuming that every gifted trial lawyer can teach would be just like assuming that a talented lawyer—even one with an intuitive grasp of our TLC Methods—could be a great architect or an awesome novelist. But, I have spent enough time with our Tribe over 16 years at TLC to know this: **Every Warrior is splendid at something.** Once we have discovered who we are, as we are called to do at TLC, we can discover this wonderful glimmer within our personhood and honestly embrace it, right? So, I want to ask the folks motivated to help The College—what splendid talent do YOU have? For example, we might be good at being an ambassador for The College; or in supporting our all-important fundraising efforts; perhaps we have an ability to assist with recruiting; we might have needed organizational skills or maybe we excel at writing articles for *The Warrior*. Everyone is good at something—and there are many, many talented people within the Tribe who have not had the opportunity to give to the full extent of their talents and availability. I would encourage everyone to think about the unique areas where they have a gifted capability and a desire to serve and let us know. Contact me, contact Laurie—we are ready to grow, but we can only grow with more talent and commitment and effort, so let us know what you can and want to do for The College and we'll go from there!

Ken: Can you say more about this.

John: Yes. It is an important issue and we should spend some time discussing it. It is a recurrent concern among the Board too. I sense there are lots of graduates who have a yearning to help and be a meaningful part of TLC. In response to this great yearning, the only opportunity that we've provided to this point is the chance to be on the teaching staff. Number one, that leaves a lot of people out; and Number two, we can't all be teachers—as I said earlier. We've got some awesome teachers at the Trial Lawyers College, but—again—not everyone is a teacher. And to say, *'I'm a good lawyer, therefore I can be a good teacher'* is just not true. That's like saying, *'I'm a lawyer, therefore I'm a good soccer coach.'* The two just do not follow and being straightforward

about that reality is only right. But we've got some awesome lawyers out there who, in addition to their lawyering, are awesome at promoting The College. We've got some awesome lawyers who, in addition to that, are great at encouraging others to give money to a worthy cause. We've got some awesome lawyers whose journalistic skills I marvel at. I feel like we can expand the opportunities for everyone to serve The College and



John with his wife Dee Anne and Gerry Spence.

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we're ready to do that. Let us hear from you.

Ken: I imagine one way to serve will be specific ways to help with the Library.

John: Absolutely—that's another important area. Board members Joey Low and John Zelbst have been very involved in talking about the different ways to raise money to build this Library. Our goal is to raise the necessary money to build it as well as to maintain it, keep the lights and electricity on and the water running, and have it be an ongoing asset to The College and not a burden. These are some of the things that I want to talk about at the F Warrior Alumni Club meeting in November, and hopefully we'll find specific ways for those interested to get involved.

Ken: You touched on diversity earlier. What are some ways you hope to achieve diversity at TLC?

John: One of the greatest things that has happened in recent years for a variety of reasons, just one being expanding the diversity of our student body, is the advent and the development of the Alumni-led Local Working Groups across the nation. These Groups have done an incredible service towards attracting more diverse students, improving the attendance at our Regional Seminars, and getting people to apply for our three-week College. They've also given an ever-widening pool of trial lawyers glimpses of TLC—lawyers who might never have been otherwise exposed to our innovative approaches. As our Tribe accomplishes this important work, we hope to reach more culturally diverse folks, more women, more black, Asian and Mexican lawyers—lawyers who represent the culturally rich country that is America. This is important and it is a topic of highlighted concern at every Board Meeting. I want to enhance the prevalence of the Local Working Groups, the groups of people they attract, and the abilities of the alumni who are leading these groups to help trial lawyers across the country to get their cases prepared so that they can be successful.

Ken: And I assume you strongly encourage folks who lead these Local Working Groups to reach out to certain lawyers you might not see at The Ranch.

John: Absolutely. We've seen over and over, through that exposure, that folks get a taste of what TLC is. Lots of diverse people, culturally diverse, men and women from different religions and different parts of the country; all people who are then motivated to apply and attend Regional Seminars and the Three-week College. They're a wonderful way for us to expand our reach and our ultimate impact on the justice system in this country.

If we keep succeeding in this area as we have in the past, I am also betting we will see an ever-evolving diversity in TLC participation, moving forward.

Ken: Are there certain types of civil lawyers that you'd like to see better represented?

John: I'd like to see more civil AND criminal lawyers at the College. There are areas of the country where we don't have as many applicants. Texas, California and Washington—these are some of the States where we have a strong presence and a larger number of applicants. One of the things that I'm focused on is the need to branch out into other States and areas and establish a presence. Next year, 2015, we're going to have a Regional Seminar in downtown Chicago. I know we've been in Illinois before, and other locations in the midwest, but not with the frequency and commitment that we've been to Texas or Washington or California. We're also returning to Atlanta. Regionals in both Chicago and Atlanta will be good ways to increase our geographic presence in new areas of the country and to appeal to a more diversified student body.

Ken: Speaking of Regional Seminars, do you see them changing in the future?

John: One of the things that I suggested at the January Board Meeting in 2013 was to try having a Regional Seminar in an urban setting, perhaps make the seminar a little bit more affordable, a little bit shorter. Our first urban seminar was at Grapevine, Texas this past April and it was an outstanding success. We had over twice as many students in attendance at this Seminar as we've had at any other Regional. One of the things that enhanced that experience for the students was that we had a group of F Warriors specifically attend and act as ambassadors of The College, not as teachers, but rather to compliment the faculty and assist the students and visit with them and follow-up to make sure the students were getting all the information and support that they needed during the three day weekend. Lead-

ing up to the Seminar, we had several Local Working Group week-end meetings where more F-Warriors led groups in a story-telling exercise or some other exercise rooted in our approaches to give them a taste of the TLC method. It was exciting for our Tribe, and for our students, and so next year we're going to have our second annual three day urban seminar in San Diego. Chicago will be the traditional four day curriculum, but will be at an urban setting. Atlanta and Texas will be the traditional



Laurie Goodman, Gerry Spence, John Sloan.

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four-day curriculum in more rural settings. Hopefully we'll be able to offer a bit of everything for folks to choose from and find the setting where they are most comfortable to learn.

Ken: What's the advantage of the urban setting versus the traditional, more rural locations?

John: I'm glad you asked that question because we're not going to abandon the traditional regional seminar that we've had in the past. The advantage of the urban setting is that we can serve more students who don't want to travel the additional distances to more remote locations. We can educate more Warriors as we are closer to major airports. Having a shorter seminar in a place that's a little more accessible enhances the ability of more people to attend. But that said, many of our Warriors still prefer the quieter, more serene rural-settings for Regionals, so we'll continue to offer those too. We are always evolving—always looking at new ideas and approaches.

Ken: Do you see the mix of the traditional rural setting and the new urban setting as a trend that will continue for the next 10 or 20 years?

John: I don't know—that's a long time! But I can say that our first experiment with urban regionals was a resounding success, and we're going to expand that further next year. We're also going to continue to hold the majority of our courses on The Ranch because of the magic that just happens all the time at that place. Incredible learning that doesn't seem to happen at other places. At the end of next year, we'll review the evaluations, look at the attendance numbers, and decide what to do next. I can also say that this Board is committed to listening to our students and continuing to strive to work to meet their needs to be the best lawyers that they can be—wherever they get their TLC training!

Ken: We talked about training TLC's faculty and new criteria to improve their ability to teach. Before we end this interview, I want to learn a little more about that.

John: Over the years, Gerry and I know that we're going to have to have more and more teaching faculty, in addition to the other staff positions that we've talked about. We always need to improve our training. We'll need to utilize additional methods to improve our training. In the past we've had a spring-time staff training event for faculty members to practice running a small group and teaching our methods. With this limited training, we've had some successes; but we've also had some not-so-sterling results. That's not a popular thing to say, but it's true. This is not the faculty person's fault. That's our fault—to not provide people with the tools they need to use and teach the methods. When I say "use" the methods, I'm not just talking about teaching a small group at The Ranch or in a breakout group at a Regional Seminar. I'm talking about Warriors actually using the methods in their offices, with their families, in their communities and in courtrooms during their trials—within all areas of their expertise so that they, and we, can all collectively be better lawyers and better represent our clients.

Ken: What about *The Warrior* magazine? I'm biased, of course. I love *The Warrior*. I think the content is fantastic. How do you see the role of *The Warrior* in coming years?

John: Five years ago, Jude established an Editorial Board for

The Warrior that I believe has facilitated the vast improvement in content and articles that we all now enjoy. J.R. Clary was named the Editor-in-Chief of that Board and he served there since late 2009, producing a quality product for our Tribe. I am proud to announce that *The Warrior* torch has now been passed to the very capable Maren Chaloupka, who has been a guiding force in that magazine for so many years. She will bring her own touch, and I think the magazine content will just continue to improve, along with the number of subscribers. Laurie also included an on-line *Warrior* archive on our website so graduates who subscribe to the magazine can search thru old articles by author or topic, and that can be a tremendous tool as one is preparing for an Opening Statement or Cross Exam. It's just an ever-present asset to provide the opportunity to always learn from the articles that have been written over the years. You know, I look forward to receiving my issue of *The Warrior* every time it's published. I read it from cover to cover. More than any other publication about trials for trial lawyers, *The Warrior* has content in every issue that helps me be a better lawyer. I see that continuing—and I encourage all grads to commit to write an article once a year. We have four issues that are theme-based, and there is so much that goes on in our cases across the country that other Warriors can learn from—if only they can read about them.

Ken: How do you think The Board will change in the next 20 years?

John: That's a good question.

Ken: Certainly some different faces, I imagine.

John: That's right, because some of us will definitely not be around!

Ken: Do you see yourself staying on as President in the long term?

John: Well, I was elected for a five year term. After that, I don't know what the board will want to do. We have talked about term limits as a way to bring in new blood. But they might also unnecessarily hurt the College by getting rid of important institutional knowledge. It's an issue we will continue to consider. Bottom line, everything The Board considers will have two main objectives: Number one, to act in the best interests of our students, faculty and alumni; and Number two, to preserve the legacy of Gerry Spence and all the great things he's done over his lifetime for us and for future Warriors.

As my conversation with John came to an end, I began thinking about Spence Mountain. I often made that infamous trek during my time at The Ranch, reaching the top after an exhausting walk and looking over the vast terrain. In the distance, The Ranch shines prominently amidst the Wyoming fields. The journey, though hard, is always worth it. I can't help but think about my next trek and what The Ranch might look like in the next 20 years. A bigger Ranch? A new library? A year-round campus sprawling with students? Whatever it may be, the future appears bright and The College in good hands with John Sloan as it's President.

Ken: Thank you, John. ☺