

Profile

Stephen M. Randels

By Charles Veigel

Stephen M. Randels is the Alternative Dispute Resolution Coordinator at the Seattle District Office of the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), an agency that promotes equal opportunity in employment through administrative and judicial enforcement of the federal civil rights laws, education and technical assistance. It is here that Steve uses his legal and non-legal experiences to run one of the most successful EEOC mediation programs in the United States.

After speaking with Steve about this article, one thing stood out: Steve has a profound commitment to ensuring that everyone's dignity is properly and equally respected and that each person can fully develop and use their human qualities of intelligence, talent and conscience. As the ADR Coordinator, Steve explains, he can help many more people—one person at a time—than he could in his previous work litigating time consuming and costly class action suits.

Growing up

The second of three children, Steve was born in Illinois. His parents grew up in Kansas where most of his father's family started out as tenant farmers and remained in small rural towns as farmers, teachers, nurses and business owners. Shortly after Steve's birth, the Randels moved to Fort Worth, Texas, where his father worked as a wildcatter putting together deals to drill oil and gas wells.

As a child Steve grew up in a segregated society. He recalls clearly his parent's example of treating everyone with dignity and respect in a community that persecuted people because of skin color, national origin, and sexual orientation. He has vivid memories of riding on segregated buses, not knowing where the invisible line separating the races to the front and back was drawn. He naively tested water fountains labeled "white" and "colored" to uncover differences. He remembers elementary school-aged white kids shouting racial epithets and hurling rocks from their playground at African-American children living in segregated shantytowns. These memories stayed with Steve and formed the basis for his decision to become an attorney and specialize in civil rights law.

With his parent's encouragement and support, Steve decided to leave Texas for broader horizons, attending boarding school in the East and college at Stanford University. Recognizing his need to learn about life, Steve joined the Peace Corps after graduating from Stanford. Assigned to serve in Venezuela, he lived in a poor barrio and worked with residents on various projects including organizing a league of sports teams and a savings and loan cooperative providing micro-loans to small businesses.

What was most remarkable, Steve recalls, was the perseverance and generosity of the Venezuelan people notwithstanding their difficulties with government officials. Randels regarded his experience in the Peace Corps as seminal and life changing. He said, "I learned more from the Venezuelan people than I could ever teach them."

Early legal career

In 1966, Steve enrolled in Boston University School of Law. The Civil Rights Movement and an activist Supreme Court inspired him to practice law and generate societal change. He helped revive



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Boston University's chapter of the Law Students Civil Rights Research Council and subsequently served on the organization's national board of directors. After working two years as an intern in a newly opened office of the Boston Legal Assistance Project, he received a Reginald Heber Smith Community Lawyer Fellowship and moved to New York City, where he took a job working in a Legal Aid storefront in Spanish Harlem.

Another reason for moving to New York was Sandy, his wife to be, who was living in a housing project in Spanish Harlem while attending the graduate school of nursing. Steve met Sandy in Boston after she returned from a Peace Corps assignment in the Ivory Coast. On their first date, Steve remembers painting a health clinic located in a public housing project in the Roxbury neighborhood of Boston. "I was hooked for life," he recalls.

Steve and Sandy moved to the Northwest in the summer of 1970, and he took a job with the Seattle Legal Services Center as a staff attorney. The move from New York City was not difficult. Sandy grew up in Eugene, and Steve believes she carefully chose to visit her family in late July. Steve fell in love with the warm, clear blue skies and long summer days. He remarked, "I had died and gone to heaven." They returned to New York, packed and moved the following month.

Legal aid and class actions

In 1974, Steve became the director of Northwest Washington Legal Services (NWLS), supervising a staff of fourteen attorneys. In 1976, he helped merge NWLS with the Seattle Legal Services Center to create a new statewide program, Evergreen Legal Services. At Evergreen, Steve coordinated a staff of twenty-three attorneys in eight different offices. He obtained a grant from the State

of Washington to fund a special Employment Law Project that focused on removing barriers poor people faced when trying to enter the labor market.

Much of Steve's work with the Legal Services programs included traveling around the state working with community groups and focusing on the cases he enjoyed most: civil rights, particularly those involving class actions and employment related issues. One case he remembers with fondness was filed on behalf of a young woman on welfare seeking job-training. She was excluded from the job-training program by federal and state agencies that gave "unemployed fathers" a priority by excluding women. A federal district court certified the class and found the regulations unconstitutional and a violation of federal civil rights statutes.

In a class action argued before the Washington State Supreme Court, Steve also successfully challenged the constitutionality of a statute that disqualified pregnant women from receiving unemployment compensation for fifteen weeks prior to their due date and ten weeks after delivery. The court awarded \$2,668,706 to a class of 5,442 women. He subsequently brought a second action that challenged a similar statute in the State of Kansas.

Steve also brought another successful case to the state Supreme Court challenging reforms to the state's unemployment compensation program. The reforms had terminated the benefits of thousands of recipients who were eligible under the old law.

EEOC

In 1979, Steve left Evergreen and took a job with the EEOC. Here he could focus exclusively on civil rights and employment issues and also work with some talented supervisors and attorneys who helped him develop his litigation skills. He was a member of a team of attorneys who conducted a month long class action sex discrimination trial against General Telephone and Electric's subsidiary in the Northwest. The Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals' decision in favor of the Commission resulted in a multi-million dollar settlement. He was also the lead attorney in a class action Equal Pay Act case filed against Associated Grocers Company.

After serving as an EEOC trial attorney for twenty years, Steve's newest challenge is running the EEOC's mediation program. He said, "it struck me that most of the work attorneys do after an action is filed is to inflict enough pain and suffering upon each other and their respective clients until all involved agree to participate in settlement discussions, mediation or other alternative dispute resolution processes. I have become an enthusiastic supporter of the Commission's offering the option to parties to resolve these disputes at the front end rather than the back end of this process."

In the federal fiscal year that ended on September 30, 2000, the Seattle office successfully mediated 154 cases with awards totaling \$2.2 million dollars, experiencing a 70% success rate with its ADR efforts. A national study commissioned by the EEOC to study its ADR program found that 91% of the parties filing discrimination charges and 96% of the respondent employers agreed at the conclusion of mediation that they would use

RANDELS continued on page 13

transactions.

By focusing on these two major objectives, YLD can tangibly contribute in making King County a better place to live and work.

Since graduating from the University of Washington, I have spent the last four years developing a commercial practice. I have served on non-profit boards, worked on affordable housing programs, and experienced the tremendous challenges and rewards associated with pro bono matters.

The next three years may be challenging for our community, since we may be on the front end of an economic downturn. Accordingly, it will take focus and vision to provide each other with opportunities to have satisfying careers. I look forward to the chance to serve.

RANDELS

continued from page 5

it again. Significantly, these results were the same regardless of whether the mediation was successful.

According to Steve, these results have been produced with far less cost and in a much shorter time period than any of the lawsuits he has prosecuted or observed in his 30 years of practice. He also believes that by offering this service, the Commission has an opportunity to touch people's lives on both sides of their dispute in a much more humane way.

Off the job

Besides his busy life at the EEOC, Steve spends his time balancing family life and his commitment to community projects. Steve is the father of two daughters, Erin and Kelly. He has proudly participated in their lives, attending their performances and sporting events, taking his family on camping and back packing trips, and watching them grow into capable and delightful adults.

Steve believes in giving back to the community. He has mentored inner city students, served on the Seattle Public School Superintendent's task force on

voluntary school desegregation, and served on boards of directors of organization like the Metrocenter Branch of the YMCA. He is enthusiastically involved as a home stay family and board member of Earth Corps, an organization that brings young people from the U.S. and foreign countries to Seattle to participate in environmental restoration projects and training. His family has hosted participants from Chile, Ecuador, Brazil and the Philippines. He recently spent a month in Chile with the families of three participants in the program.

It is probably no surprise that when asked about his work, Steve commented that he has had the good fortune to do the work that attracted him to the legal profession, to work with good people whose example helped develop his skills, and, most recently, to be part of an important new program providing services to the public. "I am one of those lucky people who love what they do." ■

Charles H. Veigel is a Seattle attorney practicing in the area of labor and employment law. He devotes a percentage of his practice to providing mediation services for the Seattle District Office of the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission.

out Washington, and we have offices nationwide work in the legal industry, and I hope to use to the Board to further the goals of the Bar Division. I greatly appreciate the opportunity to

Bar Leaders Conf

**Friday, June 8 - Sunday
WestCoast Hotel,**

What is the Bar Leaders Conference

The Bar Leaders Conference is an annual event designed to help you manage your volunteer time efficiently and effectively. The topics and activities are to inform you about the current state of the profession, giving you a once-a-year opportunity to meet and network with other bar leaders from around the state.

What is special about this year's Bar Leaders Conference?

This year's planners designed a conference that is both fun and informative. Young Lawyers, specialty bars, and many small bar associations can learn of and discuss current issues. Knowledgeable experts from the Association will give you tips on how to use your volunteer time more effectively.

Who should attend?

Any lawyer who wants to learn about getting back to the profession that has served you well. Whether you are a member of bar associations, committee chairs, or just looking for a targeted audience, this year's planners invite you to attend. Just thinking of aspiring thereto, or just looking for a chance to volunteer time and meeting lawyers with similar interests.

With such serious objectives, will there be any fun?

Yup. Sure will. If you're a golfer, you'll enjoy playing on one of the finest golf courses, Desert Canyon. And you'll enjoy the off buffet and entertainment on Friday evening.

How much does it cost?

There's no registration fee. Scholarship and financial assistance for lodging and transportation.

For more information, contact Robert Liaison, at (206) 727-8293 or via email at rliaison@waba.org