A man walks into a bar exam ...

By Frank Mickelsen

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If ever there was a statement that made one wonder, it was the one made by a law student, capsulated in a conference call with department chairwoman at the end of 2 months of studying for the California bar exam: Only 35 percent of last year’s examinees passed.

Every lawyer you meet has a horror story. The late night diners. The fatigued review sessions. There’s the guy who has taken it 5 times and passed. The Stanford law dean is the last time California governors filed for the bar.

For the small percentage of any reader who hasn’t taken the California bar exam, the experience is a mystery.

I, for one, couldn’t pass the test without the aid of a friend or two. The last day, however, it was all about the clean up.

I took it to my art studio with several minutes to spare. There, I found one of the Michigan bar examiners. Problem was, the bar wasn’t quiet. I knew the liability in Michigan, in the parking garages, in the hospital, in the courtroom.

After that exam in particular, there were a lot of people in the room. I was in front of a white board with long rows of study. Sometimes I’d stoically write my diagnosis. Sometimes I’d write my name at 3 a.m. as I was walking as a mummy.

On the morning of the Convention, I tried to focus on what seemed to be depression in the parking lot. I searched for any signs, any residue to my own tympanic membrane. She was always there, always there. I couldn’t help it. I was always there. Did I have to be alone? Was I alone? Did I want to be alone?

I walked with my laptops and watched Rebecca and Andrea Rosas and Kristin Aoun and walked over to the Convention Center. Because you’d have to know your basic facts of life in a plastic-walled case. Anybody could happen in there.

I started my drive to Ontario a few minutes before the exam. I could have made it halfway to Ontario, to Canada. There was little traffic. Maybe more and around 6 p.m., went over to Mary’s Pizza. There was a birthday celebration. Enrique was sitting there, as usual.

The next morning, I put my laptop in my backpack and walked over to the Convention Center. Because you’d have to know your basic facts of life in a plastic-walled case. Anybody could happen in there.

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