

President's Message

Another Day in the Life

She sighed. Her mind was wandering.

What time was it? She glanced at her watch: ten past midnight! No wonder she was hungry. For the past five hours, she had been completely absorbed in preparing the following day's examinations and cross-examinations, ignoring the rumbling sounds issuing from her stomach.

She spotted the room service menu, lying on the conference table in the midst of notes and post-its and pens and what-have-you. "*Flavours of Asia*" it was no doubt called. Or was it "*Flavours of the Orient*"? Suddenly confused, she was uncertain whether this was Singapore or Delhi or Dubai. No: Singapore was last month, Delhi settled the month before. Then she recalled having taken a stroll – better described as an attempted stroll – just before returning to the break-out room. Exiting the main hearing room, of course in the same hotel, she had realised to her dismay that it had been more than seventy-two hours since her last breath of fresh air. A quick shower, a change into comfortable clothes and a short walk would do her wonders, or so she thought, before the abrupt transition from freezing air conditioning to blast-furnace conditions brought her crash-landing back to reality. Skip the constitutional; go to the break-out room; do not pass go; do not collect \$200; what a life! She sighed, again.

She mused, "*Flavours of the Orient*", what hast thou in store for me? Something light, of course, perhaps the Caesar Salad (not the *Penne Napolitana*, certainly not the Chef's Special Cheeseburger). Ah, the Caesar Salad, with its tantalizing extras and the eternal dilemma: should one take the "*strips of juicy roasted Bresse poulet breast*" or indulge in the "*pan-seared shrimp with Moluccan spices*"? At least neither had been described as "*mouth-watering*" and both were certainly better than the "*homemade fries*" that invariably accompanied the club sandwich (and that invariably had that unmistakable steam-cooked texture). She was grateful for the small mercies that life sometimes grants us. Caesar salad and shrimp it would be.

Having dialled 9 and dispatched the order, she sighed, yet again, and reflected on the past fifteen hours.

All in all, it had not been a bad day (apart, of course, from the ill-fated promenade).

The arbitrators had taken frenzied notes as her structural design expert was giving evidence. She had to hand it to the woman: taking that sheet of paper, folding it so that it looked just like a box tunnel and putting a pen on top to explain why longitudinal cracking was a cause for concern whilst transversal cracking was not... just plain brilliant! Even the most dunderheaded arbitrator would have understood and the trio at the head of the table was downright mesmerised. She'd have to remember that one for future use.

If only her star witness had not let everyone down. Why did he have to look pleadingly at her at the end of each question? The fool: could he not realise how terrible that would look – and did look? And the Presiding Arbitrator... did she really have to rub it in with that rather acid instruction about not seeking help? At least the other two looked drowsy at that point (thank heavens for terrible witnesses coming right after lunch).

She shook her head. “*Snap out of it! Time to think about tomorrow.*”

Tomorrow... the prospect made her groan, no doubt more audibly than she would have wanted, for her trusted associate sitting at the other end of the conference table looked up, a quizzical expression on his even features. She always congratulated herself for having hired this one. Great resume; stellar grades and so-good-they're-hard-to-believe references (all of which were duly verified and confirmed, of course); crisp, clear and deliciously irreverent performance at the job interview. And now, here he was, looking like he actually *enjoyed* re-checking for the eighteenth time the steel rebar tonnage according to the on-site warehouse records against the delivery slips, and then against the as-built drawings. Just yesterday, he had noticed a 0.0087% discrepancy that none of the experts had picked up! Such a bright lad, and never a complaint.

So here he was, looking at her like a puppy whose sole purpose in life was to fulfil its master's commands, but not comprehending its master's current intentions. She duly reassured him, upon which he dived back into his arch-lever file (“*Hearing Bundle, Volume IV, Section B.2, tab 46, pages 14037—19512*”) with a relish that left her wondering whether he had a life. Immediately, she realised that he was probably thinking the same of her, and just as immediately she shut down that train of thought.

The groan that had prompted this brief interruption of the intoxicatingly enthusiastic tonnage verification was, unfortunately, not altogether unwarranted. The next day, she would have to get something – anything – out of the opposite party's reinforced concrete expert. This one was a tough nut to crack. She knew all too well from experience, having attempted unsuccessfully to score points against this same person on two

previous occasions. And for the past four hours or so, she had been scouring the file for the killer document, to no avail.

Sometimes she wondered why she was doing this in the first place, and recalled the famous line from *The Godfather II*, when Hyman Roth sputters at Michael Corleone, “*This is the business we’ve chosen!*” She rapidly pushed the thought out of her head. Really, what would her friends and family think if they knew she found solace by comparing herself to Hollywood gangsters?

She glanced at her watch again. Nearly 1 a.m. Where was that Caesar Salad? Had the shrimp escaped from the pan where they were doomed to be seared? Were they fetching the spices from the Banda Sea?

“*Try to stay focused, girl!*”, she scolded herself.

Her thoughts circled back to the expert. Marshalling her energy, she (figuratively) rolled up her sleeves and went back to work, moving to “*Hearing Bundle, Volume VII, Section D.4, tabs 12-18, pages 24891–26002*”.

The rest was a blur.

Four hours, one Caesar Salad and a commendably generous portion of “*pan-seared shrimp with Moluccan spices*” later, she sat back, smiling.

“*Gotcha!*” she congratulated herself. That arrogant expert would not see it coming.

She paused, basking in that warm glow kindled by the certainty of a job well done, when she was suddenly interrupted by a loud “*YES!!!*” Startled, she swivelled her gaze towards her associate. He was beaming at her. (He really did look like an eager puppy, bless him.) With no need for prompting, and in his usual succinct and to-the-point fashion, he proceeded to deliver the impressive results of his forensic investigations, the conclusion of which was that the arrogant expert would get not just one, but *two* sledgehammer-bashings. Tomorrow’s hearing was lining up very nicely, thank you.

They high-fived and agreed it was time for some sleep before another day in the life.

There was a knock on the door.

Her reverie was interrupted.

On her watch, it was ten minutes past one a.m.

The knock was repeated, followed by a muffled “*room service*”, to which she replied, wearily, “*Yes, yes...*”

Cringing, she ventured a peek at her cross-examination notes. Her worst fears came true: there were no notes, just unintelligible scribbles

referring to what looked like “*Hearing Bundle, Volume VII, Section D.4, tab 12, page 24892*”.

A cheery-looking employee wheeled in her late – her very late – supper. “*Caesar Salad with the chicken breast, sauce on the side and no croutons, just like you ordered last night and the night before... Enjoy!*”

She could tell that there would be little sleep before another day in the life.

ELLIOTT GEISINGER

SAVE THE DATE

ASA General Meeting & Conference 2017, Bern

15 September 2017

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