

**MARYLAND STATE BAR NEW ADMITTEES CEREMONY**  
**December 12, 2007 @ 1:00 p.m.**

May it please the Court...it is my honor and privilege to appear before you this afternoon at the request of the Court of Appeals . With the Court's permission, I would like to introduce the Judges of the Maryland Court of Appeals to the applicants and their guests:

THE HONORABLE CLAYTON GREENE, JR. from Anne Arundel County  
THE HONORABLE GLENN T. HARRELL, JR. from Prince George's County  
CHIEF JUDGE ROBERT M. BELL from Baltimore City  
THE HONORABLE IRMA S. RAKER from Montgomery County  
and THE HONORABLE LYNNE A. BATTAGLIA from Howard County.

My name is Sandra Strissel. I am a member of the Bar of this Court and President of the Charles County Bar Association. I became interested in a legal career when I was a young mother with no more than a high school diploma and found myself in court every six months in Child In Need of Assistance proceedings for my daughter, Amy, who was profoundly handicapped. My first goal was to get help for my daughter, but I also developed an interest in helping other families. I earned my BA and JD degrees by attending classes mostly at night while working day jobs, including being a paralegal at a large D.C. law firm. Today, I have a solo general legal practice in Charlotte Hall, Maryland where I primarily focus on family law: CINA, child custody, visitation, divorce.

The Clerk of the Court of Appeals, Mr. Alexander Cummings called me about a month ago. He asked me to speak to you upon a topic of my choice but one that you may find helpful. He suggested a speech promoting pro bono work, ethics or civility. My mother in law, actually has a phrase that addresses all three subject areas. She says, "its nice to be important, but it's more important to be nice."

As new admittees to the Maryland bar, you are important people. You have labored through twelve years of grade school, four years of college and at least three years of post graduate school. You can fascinate your peers with the Palsgraf case or discuss Black Acre ad nauseam. Most impressive is that you have passed the bar exam and the new attorney interview process. And here you sit, most eager to take the oath that will permit you to preserve the rights of the accused, to advocate the best interests of children or otherwise represent your client's legal position to the best of your ability. You are very important people indeed. But remember that it is important to be nice.

Be nice to your community. The skills and tools that you've acquired can genuinely help your community. Give your time generously, and you will find that you receive much more back. I have had the privilege of assisting people represent themselves through courthouse clinics in Charles, Calvert and Saint Mary's counties. People come in to ask for help for their domestic problems. Last month, I saw a woman whose daughter had drug problems and left two small children in her care. I assisted her to obtain temporary custody so she could register the children in school and seek medical care for them. The people are just so appreciative for the help. I've gotten hugs, candy and cookies for my assistance.

Be nice to your clients. Make attempts to understand their problems but give them a straight

forward answer regarding their situation. They will respect you for it.

Be nice to the judges. Judges are people too. They sit on the bench, day after day, hearing and assisting people with their problems. Work towards preparing your cases and researching the law to make their job easier. I routinely keep a certain Charles County judge well stocked with those strawberry filled hard candies. Most everyone in her chambers loves them and after talking to clients and arguing in court, your mouth gets dry. Keeping them in stock makes everyone happy and I don't feel so guilty just grabbing a few when I'm there.

Be nice to your adversaries. What goes around, comes around. Even though they represent the party on the other side of the "V" and appear to be just so misguided by their clients and the law. They have lives and families too. If you've missed a deadline or need a continuance for a personal matter, wouldn't the opposing counsel be more inclined to not oppose your request if you were "nice"?

You don't want to be the lawyer that the clerks and other attorneys roll their eyes about. I find that there's one of those in Charles, Calvert and Saint Mary's County who files frivolous and "flaming" motions, who frequently objects to continuances and is generally scary. I find that its better for the clients to talk to the opposing counsel to resolve the case, rather than spend time in court all day litigating.

Be nice to the clerks at the courthouse. Now, these are people who can really help you! Let's say you're navigating through a relatively new area of the law. Several years ago, I had a lady who sought to complete the purchase of property from a tax sale. That's called a "foreclosure of the right of redemption". I asked the courthouse clerk for some help and she directed me to some files from other cases to copy. They can also tell you who the chamber's judge is or who else in the legal community you may best talk to about a situation.

Be nice to your family. They have supported you through, at least 19 years of school. They've heard you cry while preparing for the bar exam and want to continue to love and support you.

And, finally, be nice to yourself. Zealous advocacy is stressful. Make the time to go golfing (if you enjoy that sort of thing), or join an athletic club – kicking during a Jazzercise aerobics class does wonders for me.

So remember, while it's so nice to be important, it is more important to be nice. I hope that you all have enjoyable and truly rewarding careers and wish the best to you all. Happy Holidays!

Now, with the permission of the court, I move for the admission to the Bar of Maryland the candidates seated here before you. I request, in accordance with the preassigned numerical order, starting with the candidate here in front of the podium, that the candidates please stand individually, announce your full name and then resume your seat.