

Going Over 65 in the Law Office

Sharon F. Beall



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I'm not only over 65; I'm 71 and still working daily, awakening to my alarm at 5:15 a.m. I love my work, love computer technology, and love the type of legal work I do—Oil, Gas and Mineral Law.

I attained my PLS certification in 1983—of which I am most proud. I had never thought about taking the exam until one day at our Longview Legal Secretaries meeting, one of our girls said, “Nobody in this organization is smart enough to pass the test.” That did it—I took it; I passed (thank goodness). I was also the Texas Association of Legal Secretaries “Legal Secretary of the Year for the State of Texas” in 1988, and editor of the Oil and Gas Section of our Law Office Handbook in the late 1980s.

I have two jobs—I work for my long-time attorney boss, Howard P. Coghlan, of Longview, Texas, who is Board Certified in Oil, Gas and Mineral Law; and I also work at Chinn Exploration Co., a company that explores for natural gas.

When I was 26 years old, I applied for a job at Kenley, Boyland, Hawthorn & Starr, then one of Longview's oldest law firms, and was hired at a starting salary that was a load of money “back then.” When Mr. Coghlan joined our firm, I was so fortunate that he was placed in the office near my desk, and I began to do his work. What a joy. After a year or so, he told me he was leaving the firm and going out on his own—moving

down the hall in our current building—asking me, “Do you want to go”? I ran over him getting down the hall fast enough! (I'm not even sure he finished asking the question before he had my answer.)

Working for him has been the best part of my legal secretarial life—all 44 years of it—because he is a kind man, an intelligent man, and a man of God. In later years, Mr. Coghlan's law firm was one of Longview's largest. When he turned 76, he decided to retire from his own law firm (he is now 87), and I went with him—but working only one-half day for him in the office he and Dr. Peggy Coghlan prepared for me in their new large home out in the country. The view from my office's French doors is a lake with geese gliding along on it.

Dr. Coghlan is a former Vice President of Kilgore College, a philanthropist, first woman to receive the Doctor of Education from Texas A&M, a charming and lovely lady, and one for whom I also work when I am at their home office. I often find on my desk Mr. Coghlan's arch enemy—a “dead” stapler in need of refilling—a technology he hasn't mastered.

Mr. Coghlan is the sailor in the dark uniform on the left in the famous “Kissing Sailor” photo taken at Times Square June 1945 on V-J Day. We have a large print of that picture hanging outside my office.

Because of my association with Dr. Peggy and Howard Coghlan for so many years, I have been introduced to Governors, Congressmen, and people of high ranking in the state. One time, I was in with a mob of folks at the Gregg County Courthouse

Professional Life

waiting to see then-Governor Mark White, who, when he walked past me and my friends said, “Hi, Sharon.” For a time, I was the “It Girl,” to say the least.

Mark Mueller, Land Manager from the Chinn offices, was in Mr. Coghlan’s office one afternoon and told him he needed a part-time person to work six weeks in his land department. Since I was already working one-half day for Mr. Coghlan and was available, I began to work at the Chinn offices for one-half day each morning, and then I would go to Mr. Coghlan’s after lunch. The six weeks came and went quite fast. I asked the lady I was working with if I should just “*type slower*,” in order to stay there and work with her, and, after nine years, I am still with Mr. Chinn’s company (am I on permanent now?)

However, I’m not working with the land department but for “that lady,” my boss, Kathleen Boyce, who is Chinn’s Manager and the smartest lady about the oil and gas business I ever met. I help her with Working Interest shareholders--creating Assignments of Working Interest, Transfer Assignments, correspondence with shareholders, and sending out monthly working interest checks. I worked in the same large office with Mrs. Boyce for several years--learning from her in a few years via “osmosis” more than I could have learned in a lifetime any place else.

For the past several years, I have shared the large reception-area office with my young friend, Payton, who is a joy to work with, meeting and greeting clients and shareholders from all over the world. Even though I am “this age” (71), they placed me out front to work with people who come see us with questions about their interests. I often set up the conference room for visitors with coffee, snacks, ice water, etc.

One fun thing I have done in the last few years is to help a Longview family who had begun collecting classic cars. Since my father had been an automobile dealer, I knew what most of the old cars were and had driven many of them. I set up their classic car company with the state agencies, managed the paperwork for them and got them a dealer’s license. Seeing the old cars all bright and shiny--some over 70 years old--being taken care of and loved by everyone viewing them, is awesome indeed.

I do anything requested of me and do it as best I can. Nothing is worth doing unless you put all you have into it and do it well.

Computers are also among the “fun” things I do--I have two laptops, a desktop computer--and three printers. I have taken apart, repaired, and successfully put back together my computers. My mom, Frances Waggoner (age 92), says my home office looks like something from NASA. Helping my older friends as their personal “computer tech,” when they are having problems with their computers or just problems with themselves regarding computers, is a delight. I love going by and helping these friends get their printers working or fixing Facebook or Outlook for them.

My hobbies are cruising on Carnival ships and bass fishing with my friend Bill Hewitt; playing with my fourth rescue kitty, Kerry-Kat; and I am a former second-time President of the Gladewater Former Students’ Association, a Texas not-for-profit educational assistance organization in Gladewater. When my Class of 1961 had its 50th anniversary of graduation a couple of years ago, we wore poodle skirts, chiffon scarves around our necks, and our black and white oxfords. We danced the night away to a rock ’n roll d.j. I gave “bop” and “stroll” lessons to those who didn’t know how to do them. In 2004 the Gladewater

organization bestowed upon me its “Outstanding Alumni” Award, another honor I cherish.

My daughter, Diane McKnight, as well as my mom, are both five-year breast cancer survivors. Knowing they are both doing so well now tells me daily that there is a higher power in our lives.

Getting up at 5:15 each morning is a challenge that keeps me alert and, I think, young at heart. When I wake up, I’m glad there is another day I feel I can make a difference in this world—even though I am “this age” and have white hair!

My favorite saying, from an older sci-fi movie, *Galaxy Quest*, is “**Never give up and never surrender.**” That’s me, all right—not ever giving up and certainly never ever surrendering to life and its challenges. I am truly blessed.

Sharon Beall, Certified PLS, is a Charter Member of Legal Secretaries International Inc. and, as you see from her article, she has earned many career and other honors. We are especially blessed to have her as a member, and the legal secretarial profession can look to Sharon as an exceptional and exemplary role model. (And maybe—just maybe—she’s one of those many reasons that employers do well to hire experience, good sense, and “seasoning” over young and inexpensive.—*Ed.*)



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By Edwina Klemm