



Feature

Actor, Author and Attorney

By Judith Earley

In December 2006, attorney George Wallace will reach a milestone: he will have spent 25 years in the practice of law. Currently he is a partner in the firm of Wallace & Schwartz in Pasadena, CA. Wallace & Schwartz is a two-attorney firm with a mixed litigation practice emphasizing professional liability defense (mostly on behalf of veterinarians), insurance coverage issues, general business litigation, and civil appeals.



Wallace took an interesting path to his vocation of law and avocation of writing. He completed his undergraduate work at the University of California, Berkeley, where he was an English major who spent as much time as possible in the Department of Dramatic Arts. "I had taken up acting while in high school, and I continued doing that at Berkeley," said Wallace. "In fact, the name for my personal blog—a *fool in the forest*—

alludes in part to the role of Touchstone, the fool in *As You Like It*, which I played in a Berkeley production. I have said for years that one of my reasons for becoming an attorney rather than an actor is that the practice of law pays more reliably than acting (usually) does." He left acting behind when he graduated from Berkeley and received his law degree from UCLA in 1981.

Although he never disciplined himself to pursue writing as a career, Wallace has always enjoyed it. "In my law practice, crafting a well-written, clear, and compelling argument or brief is one of the most satisfying things I get to do," said Wallace. "Legal writing is, of course, a different animal from other 'creative' sorts of writing; the tone that needs to be maintained in a brief is entirely different from an essay or an anecdote or a post on a weblog."

While legal writing has to maintain a certain decorum and seriousness, Wallace said that it doesn't have to be boring, and he enjoys the challenge of taking what can be complex or dry material and presenting it in a way that will lead the judge or other readers through the maze of argument without causing confusion or boredom.

Wallace has had a longstanding interest in reading poetry and is referenced on a lawyer-poetry website. "I have dabbled in writing it on and off over the years. I wouldn't actually claim to be a poet, but poetry is a major interest," said Wallace.

"Most of the writing I do these days is either in the context of my practice or in the context of one of my blogs. The most recent poetry writing I have done has been entirely in the field of light verse. Over the past three years on the weblog, a fool in the forest, I have produced a series of short, humorous poems in the double-dactyl form. 2004 was my big double-dactyl year, with production falling off since mid-2005," said Wallace. Examples and an explanation of the double-dactyl form can be found on his blog at http://declarationsandexclusions.typepad.com/foolblog/double_dactyls/index.html.

Wallace started reading blogs in mid-2001 and quickly discovered that even then there was a remarkable array of clever, intelligent blogs being written on almost every subject one could think of or have interest in. "I soon became particularly interested in following legal weblogs (even before they began to be referred to as "blawgs") and weblogs covering arts and cultural issues," said Wallace. "As the technical barriers to entry fell lower and lower, with free or low-cost posting and hosting services such as Blogger and TypePad, I succumbed to the temptation to jump in myself. I had two motives. First, I thought I could use a law-related weblog to gain a somewhat higher profile for my insurance law practice. Second, it sure looked like fun."

A fool in the forest debuted on July 2, 2003, primarily as a test and for Wallace to learn the ropes of blogging. "Having built a little confidence, I got an account with TypePad, transferred the fool blog there, and launched *Declarations and Exclusions*, my weblog on California insurance law and related matters, in August of 2003," said Wallace.

According to Wallace, *a fool in the forest* took on a life of its own very soon after he began writing. "It became, and remains, an outlet for whatever may be striking my fancy at any given time, and it gives me the opportunity to talk/write about subjects that are interesting to me but that may not always interest anyone else and that usually have little or



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nothing to do with the law,” said Wallace. He added that it is a useful way to keep the “human-being-who-is-not-always-a-lawyer” side of his personality occupied. It also provides a venue for his slightly silly, pun-loving side, which typically has to be kept in check in legal writing.

On the other hand, *Declarations and Exclusions* started out as a fairly focused and serious rundown of new cases and other legal developments affecting insurance and professional liability law in California. Over the course of three years, the blog’s focus has wandered and expanded to cover insurance-related political developments (such as the upcoming election of a new insurance commissioner), tort reform, wine law, art law, and other law-related subjects that strike Wallace as interesting. “I try to keep the tone a bit more serious than I do on the fool blog, with mixed success. Serious or not, the goal on *Declarations and Exclusions* is to write about law and insurance issues in a way that is clear, useful, and, I hope, interesting,” said Wallace.

For Wallace, being a lawyer involves working through a series of puzzles using language and logic. He said he has always preferred motion and appellate practice to trial work because those areas entail piecing together coherent arguments—or dismantling or showing the incoherence of opposing arguments—and presenting his clients’ positions in the clearest and most compelling fashion. “Producing a well-crafted motion or brief or oral argument can be as satisfying as any other creative process. Insurance coverage practice provides similar satisfactions, with its call to parse through policy language, finding or defusing ambiguities and looking for a consistent meaning,” said Wallace.

“In the end, good legal writing needs to be plain, good writing, and a good legal argument needs to be conveyed as compellingly and plainly as any other idea worth writing about. The pleasures of bringing care and craftsmanship to bear on a project are much the same whether the law is involved or not.”

Prohibitively expensive legal services are a major problem, from Wallace’s point of view. “When my partner and I set up our current firm about 15 years ago, we consciously chose to keep our overhead low so that we could make an entirely decent living in the practice of law without having to charge our clients high hourly rates,” said Wallace. “As a profession, I think attorneys have swung too far toward letting the business end of practice dominate the service end. A law firm certainly doesn’t need to be operated as a charity, but it shouldn’t be a milking station for cash cows, either.”

Wallace said his advice for law students may come too late for those already in law school. “Do not enter the legal profession unless you have a high degree of certainty that this is what you want to do. This world already has too many unhappy lawyers in it,” said Wallace.

A native of Michigan, Wallace grew up in suburban Detroit, where his father was an automotive engineer for Chrysler; his family moved to the Los Angeles area when he was 16. Wallace and his wife live in Glendale and just celebrated their 20th anniversary. “We have two sons, one about to turn 19 and the other about to turn 16. Neither has shown any interest in getting into the practice of law. If they did, they would get my full support, but I’m not going to insist if it isn’t their own idea,” said Wallace.

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