



Karen DeMeola is the 94th president of the CBA. She is the assistant dean of student life at UConn School of Law, where she plans, manages, and oversees programs and services for the student body, including career planning, disability services, and student services. She advises students confronted with a variety of issues, including academic advising, personal matters, and wellness challenges such as addiction and mental health concerns. In addition, Dean DeMeola is charged with implementing and managing diversity programming as well as professional and community development activities.

On April 19, we touched down in a bucket list destination: Cuba. My father's accounts of his time in Cuba with the US Navy in the 1960s left with me a desire to see this country. When the opportunity arose to visit the country on a rule of law trip with other bar leaders, I could not say no. The excitement of going turned to panic as I read blogs and books and websites. Excitement returned when I remembered where we were going. We landed, quickly made it through "immigration," and made our way to the restroom where we were promptly handed three squares of toilet paper. No seat on the toilet,

Ready to Pack My Bags

By Karen DeMeola

no soap and water found here. We knew it was coming, like following Milepost on our trip to Alaska two years ago—turn left, look up, and you will see Dall sheep—we were prepared. We dug in our bag for toilet paper and antibacterial wipes. And so began a four-day journey through Cuba and home again.

It is quite easy for me to frame things in terms of privilege. I see it, I feel it, I have it, and I don't. Serving as CBA president is a privilege. I have been able to move initiatives forward, create programs, steer committees and sections, and develop education and training programs. I have reconnected with many classmates and colleagues and have gained new and unexpected friends along the way. I have learned about privilege travelling to all corners of the state, talking to and witnessing local attorneys in action. Attorneys in sweet rides and expensive clothes in some jurisdictions and attorneys barely making it in others. This observation replays in my mind, forcing me to think about the ways privilege impacts access to justice for both clients and lawyers.

The ways in which technology connects us and enhances our practices is amazing and terrifying. Blockchain, smart contracts,

crypto currency, and the dark web feel like science fiction coming to life. Machine learning and artificial intelligence can make our lives more efficient, but what is the cost? This is not a statement about the fall of lawyers; instead, it is a wakeup call that we, as lawyers, need to embrace technology for the good of our practice and our clients.

My reliance on technology was constrained while in Cuba. We received complimentary Internet from the hotel but had no cell service. We limited our use to connecting with family via Facebook nightly and left the unused hours—which cost \$1/hour—to the staff. Though at first anxiety producing, it was nice to be pulled from the technology that keeps us from truly connecting with each another. The technology that shows us news, images of despair, poverty, racism, sexism, and war sucks us into a morass of depression and negativity. For four glorious days, I wasn't constantly checking my e-mail or my news feeds. I was tech free, but constantly aware that I was free because there was no immediate or easy access.

Seeing things with my personal and American lens was challenging while in Cuba. The poverty, explainable by influx of money, change in government, and embargoes was apparent, but there was also beauty,

history, and an immense cultural pride. We learned from Supreme Court judges, lawyers, economists, political scientists, and journalists about the myths, history, legal system, economy, joys, and benefits of Cuba. No one dies from curable diseases, and education and housing is free. But this was only part of the story, the narrative emerging from a more progressive Cuba. We saw the best and the not so great of Havana, but we saw it from four and five star hotels, air-conditioned buses, and amazing privatized restaurants catering to tourists and the wealthy.

Our ability to challenge our leaders locally and nationally, protecting the rule of law, upholding the constitution, and fighting for equality are so ingrained in all we do. We may be pulled apart by geography, socioeconomic status, gender, race, religion, politics, work, and so many other things. We may highlight our differences instead of celebrating our commonality. We may hate what our opposition has to say but we uphold their right to say it. Privilege.

The trip was a great way to start my wind down as president. Cuba was amazing and beautiful, and a reminder of the privileges I carry. Those privileges didn't stop me from riding in a 1957 Chevy Bel Air convertible, or staying at the ascribed hotels, eating amazing food, or toasting at every meal. I was keenly aware of the ways in which privilege plays out and it re-framed my vision and understanding of the country. I tipped more, left behind items less available there, shared perspectives, and learned a lot about myself and others. I would go back in a heartbeat and recommend that anyone interested should visit.

Not all get to lead an amazing organization of engaged and brilliant lawyers who want to make a difference in the world. To join the conversation and collaborate on access to justice, the rule of law, and the future of the profession. To have a talented, hard-working group of people keeping the organization relevant, engaged, and in operation. To be part of a team that has embraced all that is authentically me. For all of this and more, I am ever grateful. It has been a pleasure to lead the CBA and I look forward to what's to come. **CL**

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