



Lawyers and Social Media: a Powerful Force

Written on April 14, 2010 by Donna Seyle

I'm going to break all the rules of social media optimization here and start this post talking about the movie "Legends of the Fall", which I had watched on Sunday. The story is about a lot of things, but what reached out and grabbed me was the nonchalance with which Alfred, the older brother/politician, treated the murder of his brother Tristan's wife (Tristan being a defiant kind of guy) during a confrontation about selling alcohol during prohibition. Tristan was a low-end dealer, but he was beginning to eat into the profits of Alfred's buddies, who served most of the city folk their share, including Alfred. His wife's murder: collateral damage, no one to report it to because they were all on the take, and Alfred was clearly not concerned.

Yesterday, the news reported an incident of a police department that had to release a group of college students held in custody for beating policemen, when a video was released on uTube depicting the police viciously beating the kids with clubs. Now the video is being circulated internationally to show once again how authority attempts to hide its mistakes.

Later that morning, a friend emailed me a link to the video, at WikiLeaks.org, that captured the 2007 Iraq massacre (yes, it was) of a group of men crossing the street. The military had called it being "engaged in combat", but the only combat apparent was our helicopter gunmen opening fire on about 8 men nonchalantly crossing the street, 2 of whom appeared to be carrying rifles. Among them were the 2 Reuters reporters carrying their cameras who were killed in the attack. There was absolutely nothing suspicious about their behavior, and I doubt it was unusual to see Iraqies carrying weapons in 2007 Baghdad. And oh, the kids in the van that arrived to try to recover the dead and wounded? Well, our guys couldn't see them, they were too busy bantering and making sure they shot down anyone who appeared at the scene. But the truth of that incident, too, is now circulating the 2.0 globe, confirming the suspicions that not all who serve care about liberating the downtrodden from their oppressors, as we are led to believe.

And that is the beauty of social media. 24/7 real-time access to the reality rather than the next day's regurgitation of the story concocted to justify action. Anyone engaged in web 2.0 can become part of an international community that might just be the last stance against self-annihilation.

As lawyers, we received an education that took us down the dark corridors of our institutions. The benefits of that education is that we were also taught what could be done to make it right. "Making it right" hardly ever seems to be accomplished. But by engaging with online communities armed with our knowledge, we have so much to give to accomplish things that in Tristan's time he couldn't even fight for.

Later on in the afternoon, (yes, this was all in one day) I was led by my twitter/facebook friend [Tim Baran](#) to a site called [Cutting Edge Law](#). The tagline of the site is this: "What if Lawyers were Peacemakers, Problem Solvers and Healers of Conflicts?" This new and exciting legal networking site advocates for a legal, institutional and world view that includes collaborative law and practice, community lawyering, holistic or preventative law, and lawyers for social change.

Of course, there have always been lawyers who fought for social change. But there is one thing they did not have by their side: social media. They could not operate with technology that allowed them to collaborate internationally, gave them access to information they were never supposed to see, and spread their message to people and places they did not know. All that is available to us now, and we have a responsibility to use it.

We are no longer one person standing in a lonely courtroom whose pleas for justice are falling on deaf ears. We can be part of international communities that are as close as the nearest wifi connection, whose focus on cooperation and mutual respect, even in the face of disagreement, could lead to (dare I say it?) solving international challenges.

I know these are unstable times for lawyers and we are preoccupied with our own survival. But it is also the best of times for the world community to become just that. Lawyers have the skills, the presence, the training to organize efforts and overcome challenges. Let's not let this chance slip us by.

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