

AlterEgo: Robert V. Bickers, Jr. Attorney

Bob Bickers, Artist

Editor's note: Robert V. Bickers, Jr., was a claims attorney for Nationwide Insurance's South Central Office before moving to Murrysville in 1992. His wife, Diane, spent several years as a defense trial attorney for Nationwide Insurance before opening her law office in Murrysville in 1996. After working for six years in private practice handling cases in workers' compensation, FEOLA, Social Security disability, and insurance bad faith claims, Bob joined his wife's law firm in 1999, forming the multi-county general practice of Bickers & Bickers. You can find them on the web at www.bickerslaw.com.

There are many worthy and fulfilling pursuits for a person wanting to make a difference in this world," says Murrysville attorney Bob Bickers. "One is to help others in need. Another is to inspire others by showing them the wonders that surround us. As an attorney and an artist, I feel fortunate to have been able to do both."

Robert Vandergriff Bickers, Jr., Esquire, grew up in Memphis, Tenn., the son of a lawyer who dabbled in oil painting. Following in his father's

footsteps, Bob now shares a law practice with his wife, Attorney Diane Landis Bickers, in Murrysville, and devotes evenings and weekends to the pursuit of his love of painting and photography, as both a teacher and an artist.

We talked to Bob about his interest in law and the arts.

Q WHEN DID YOUR INTEREST IN ARTISTIC EXPRESSION BEGIN?

A I developed an interest in art at an early age. In junior high school,

I won student art competitions for my drawings, and I developed an interest in photography, taking and developing my own pictures.

Q DID YOU CONTINUE TO PURSUE THESE INTERESTS AFTER HIGH SCHOOL?

A In fact, I worked my way through college with my own professional photography business. I took wedding photos, engineering photos, and photographed real estate for mortgage companies. I drafted surveys, designed logos, and documented evidence for attorneys.

Q WHEN DID YOU ADD PAINTING TO YOUR REPERTOIRE?

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▲ Bob Bickers



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A I attended law school at night while working as an insurance adjuster during the day. After graduation from law school, I joined my father's law practice in Memphis, Tennessee. As a young lawyer just beginning to build a practice, there were many days when I found myself sitting in the office waiting for the phone to ring or clients to walk in the door.

It was during this period of time on my hands, in 1984, that I became inspired by the infectious enthusiasm of television artist Bill Alexander. Bill, in his deep German accent, would challenge us to "fire in the paint" as he jabbed and almost violently pushed his pigment-laden brush into the canvas and ground it in. Not exactly a light touch, except when he added details to the canvas at the end of the show. That's when I decided to take up oil painting.

Q WERE YOU SELF-TAUGHT OR FORMALLY TRAINED?

A I took several classes in art, air brushing, and portrait oil painting at Memphis State University. And with practice and fine attention to the techniques of other painters I admired, I started to exhibit my work at local galleries, even winning several awards for pen and ink, gouache, acrylic, alkyd, and oil paintings at local and regional art contests in the Memphis area. Eventually, a couple of galleries represented me in Memphis.

Q WHAT DO YOU MEAN WHEN YOU SAY THAT BEING BOTH AN ARTIST AND AN ATTORNEY HAS GIVEN YOU SOME ADVANTAGES?

A I'll explain. What I have learned in one area has helped me in the other. Powers of observation, composition, color balance and design help me to organize my mind and make sense of what I am seeing. In the same way, a lawyer is trained to sort through and organize facts, using logic and reason to understand the law and the world around us. I think this mental structure and discipline helps me both as an attorney and an artist.

Q WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE SUBJECT MATTER?

A Both landscapes and portraits capture my interest. I like trying to make a portrait more than a landscape of flesh and textiles. Capturing someone's "essence" as a human being with oil paint is such a rare achievement, but well worth the effort. I also want to do more paintings dealing with aviation and space exploration, as these are subjects that I find very interesting.

Q WOULD YOU AGREE THAT YOUR PHOTOGRAPHS AND PAINTINGS CONTAIN A CERTAIN CLARITY, A VIBRANCY OF LIGHT AND COLOR?

A Actually, I think that is a trait that started about five or six years ago. In 2005, cataracts in both of my eyes were slowly developing to the point of interfering with my life. When I had both of my lenses replaced, I got my first clear look at my artwork and I was astonished.

As my eyesight slowly faded, I had unconsciously compensated by brightening colors to the hue that looked right to me. I was horrified at first, but others seemed to like what I had done. Thankfully, I had not painted or printed many portraits during that stretch of time, which I now call my "bright" period—though some might call it my "blight" period.

I'm just glad to get my eyesight back to normal. But I must admit that after taking another look at my artwork, something of the experience may have stuck with me after all.

Q DO YOU CREATE FOR OTHERS AS MUCH AS FOR YOURSELF?

A Personally, the process of creation and imagination is both fascinating and freeing. Making something recognizable from mere pigment is amazing. And making something that can touch the human heart is nothing less than a miracle.

I hope most people enjoy my paintings. I hope my artwork will touch some people on an emotional level, and be drawn to my work enough to take it home with them. A fine piece of art can bring enjoyment for generations.

Bob is a member of the Pittsburgh Society of Artists and is an active member of the East Suburban Artists League, often exhibiting his paintings and photographs in their shows.

For anyone interested, Bob will be teaching acrylic painting classes at Michaels Arts & Crafts at their Greensburg, Monroeville, and Pittsburgh Mills locations.

His work, including information about recent and upcoming exhibitions, can be found at <http://bobbickers.net> or you may contact him at 724-325-4951. 🐾

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Vietnam: Thirty-Five Years Later

by The Hon. Daniel J. Ackerman

Could it possibly be that long ago? When American living rooms nightly reverberated with the rattle of machine guns and small arms fire coming from television sets, a few of them showing the conflict in color, as we stared with



▲
The Hon. Daniel J. Ackerman

blank faces. Rice paddies, protesters, and body counts were brought before us as regularly as weather reports, and it seems like it was only yesterday.

It was a war which began in November 1955, but it received no attention then. Awareness began in

the early '60s when, as part of the Cold War, the United States signaled its intention to prevent a communist takeover of South Vietnam as part of its wider strategy of containment. By the time it ended with the fall of Saigon on April 30, 1975, the events in Southeast Asia had transformed our political landscape and caused the deaths of three to four million Vietnamese on both sides; one to two million Laotians and Cambodians; and 58,159 Americans.

For some members of the Westmoreland Bar, the war was not a televised event. It took them out of their living rooms and scattered them

over a broad area to all parts of the world. Like most in the military, the majority did not see combat, but they made the contribution asked of them by their country. We asked for their recollections and thoughts.

Some of our colleagues entered military service as lawyers. **JIM SILVIS** and **JUDGE JOSEPH HUDOCK** joined the Navy, completed the Navy Officer Candidate School and the Navy Justice School at Newport, Rhode Island, and were commissioned as Lieutenants, Junior grade (the judge in 1963 and Jim in 1965). Judge Hudock was commissioned on November 22, 1963, the date of President Kennedy's assassination.

The future judge soon learned that the law of promissory estoppel did not apply to the Navy. He recalls:

The Navy recruiter told us that we would be asked to select three places we would like to serve, and that we were virtually guaranteed to receive one of those choices. I chose Newport, Boston, and Washington, D.C.

My orders came in for the First Marine Air Wing at Iwakuni, Japan! Not only did I not get one of my selections, I didn't even get the Navy! I got the Marine Corps!

It turned out to be a great experience. There were six Marine lawyers—all well educated and very competent

—and me in the legal office. We became good friends and aside from their calling me "Squid" (*Editor's note: Oh, if only we had known that while he was on the bench*), I very much enjoyed my tour there. At that time (early 1964), Vietnam was on the back burner. Most Americans did not know where it was. We had a squadron of helicopters there, but Vietnam was not that dangerous. Military personnel had their dependents living with them in and around Saigon.

The situation changed dramatically in mid-1964, after North Vietnamese gunboats fired on one of our destroyers in international waters. In the middle of the night, we were told to be ready to ship out for Vietnam. I was shocked to see the enlisted men in our office packing up law books in crates. This was my first realization that Marines took law books and lawyers to the front lines. I had assumed that lawyers stayed far away from danger.

The whole thing blew over, and we remained at Iwakuni, but the activity was markedly increased.

In March of 1965, my tour of duty was over and I was transferred to Mare Island, California. Several weeks later, the entire First Marine Air Wing was transferred to Vietnam, and the war escalated rapidly.

In the years during the war, the term "Hanoi" conjured up images of violence, communism, assassinations,

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