Arizona Summit Law School

From the SelectedWorks of Jennifer E Spreng

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Before Creation, There was the Big Bang

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BEFORE CREATION, THERE WAS THE BIG BANG

Frodo: I can't do this, Sam.

Sam: ... It's like in the great stories, Mr. Frodo. The ones that really mattered. Full of darkness and danger, they were. And sometimes you didn't want to know the end. Because how could the end be happy? How could the world go back to the way it was when so much bad had happened? But in the end, it's only a passing thing, this shadow. Even darkness must pass. A new day will come. And when the sun shines it will shine out the clearer. Those were the stories that stayed with you. That meant something, even if you were too small to understand why. But I think, Mr. Frodo, I do understand. I know now. Folk in those stories had lots of chances of turning back, only they didn't. They kept going. Because they were holding on to something.

Frodo: What are we holding onto, Sam?

Sam: That there's some good in this world, Mr. Frodo . . . and it's worth fighting for.¹

Eighteen months ago, we sat in the Phoenix Law Review office and dreamed how we could use this issue to transform what had been the lived experience of so many staff members into one focused even more on serving their personal, professional, and intellectual needs.

We were sure it could be done, but we knew we would need massive changes in culture, organization, and infrastructure—and a lot of luck.

With the odds so stacked against us, naturally, we had to go for it!

We needed a used-car salesman, an Iowa farm boy, a social worker, a project manager, and a tech dude to make it all happen. We did not care whether they had any background in scholarly writing or publication; our mild preference was that they would not.

But we definitely cared about whether they knew how to work.

We went out and got them. We did whatever it took.

Neither of us intended many of the things that happened during the production of this issue. We certainly did not intend for the passage above from *The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers* to seem so often apropos.

But we read the introduction to this issue from J.T. Green, Alex Crabb, Gabe Hassen, Jim Plitz, and Chris Trueblood, and we are puzzled. They do not seem sure about whether they were successful with their project.

Well, we know we were successful with our project. This team was our project.

Its achievements are extraordinary, because we dream very big.

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Phoenix School of Law welcomes students with a staggering range of life stories, professional backgrounds, and intellectual/academic experiences. Few bear much resemblance to ours. One of us graduated with honors in American history from a small, private Eastern liberal arts college where she wrote at least one significant scholarly paper every term and while a sole practitioner, published in many scholarly and popular genres. One of us holds twenty-six United States patents, gives presentations to international audiences, has several scholarly and professional publications, and has been the only member to serve on the editorial board or staff of all three volumes of *Phoenix Law Review*.

We do not care about anyone else’s background. We want all of our students, colleagues, and friends to enjoy the enriching life of the mind that we also seek for ourselves.

It has been more challenging than we thought—but also very rewarding. As our friend, Volume III’s ever-intrepid Vice Editor-in-Chief Kimberly Garde once said, “I had never READ a law review article; how on Earth was I supposed to WRITE one?!?”

Yet as you will observe in this issue, she wrote a very, very fine one.

Reality: *Phoenix Law Review* might be the first and last great intellectual experience of many staff members’ lives. We are responsible to make sure it is the best it can be.

To be the best it can be, *Phoenix Law Review* must also be several things.

*Phoenix Law Review* must be accessible. Staff service can be almost impossible for evening and other non-traditional students who lack flexibility to be physically present on campus. High daily classroom
expectations necessarily limit the investment any student can make. As one of us has often said: “People only have so many hours to give Law Review. You can use them well or you can use them poorly, but when they are gone, they are gone.”

*Phoenix Law Review* must be nurturing. *Phoenix Law Review* exists for the benefit of staff. We always have had time for both the member hanging onto the masthead for dear life and the future editor-in-chief. A big part of nurturing is a package of training, teaching, opening minds, and unlocking hearts. The labor to deliver original work is “terrible hard.”

*Phoenix Law Review* must have high standards. We both hope for the highest quality editing and writing from staff and board members, but our own high standards extend to the ways members treat colleagues on the staff; the depth of their honor and integrity; and the extent of everyone’s commitment to finishing projects of the highest quality, however long it takes.

*Phoenix Law Review* also must be relevant. It must create an intellectual milieu for the entire school from the interests of staff headed for personal plight practices.

Oh, and ideally, *Phoenix Law Review* should be fun.

In August 2009, my (Javier’s) carefully selected “legal ed team” of newbie staff, armed with nothing but complete certainty that they were hot stuff, set out to stand on the shoulders of the editorial board giants of the past and transform those ideals into reality.

I (Javier) started by rolling out my electronic editing initiative designed for *Phoenix Law Review’s* specific editorial needs, especially making full participation accessible to all.

By January 2010, Gabriel Hassen had fully implemented it.

Alex Crabb shaped the team’s original invention, the “perspective,” to expose staff and readers to the intriguing voices of busy professionals missing in scholarly journals. Alex once worried if he had a sufficient suit for a downtown law office visit. Today he chats confidently with internationally known authors and polishes their work like jewels.

Christine Trueblood took responsibility for the most pages and the most important authors: *Phoenix Law Review’s* staff and board members. She and the team modeled our ideal of lavishing kid glove treatment on colleagues’ articles, treating every one like a Rolls Royce.

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2 A.A. Milne, *Buckingham Palace*, in *When We Were Very Young* (1924).
Someone recently asked one of us, “Who will replace Jim Plitz on the Volume IV editorial board when he graduates this December.”

Response? “You don’t replace Jim Plitz.”

Jim, a former Fortune 100 company project manager, spent months studying procedures manuals, legal scholarship blogs, and editing feedback from other law reviews. He then converted Phoenix Law Review’s existing “editing team” structure into a well-oiled editing machine. Jim also led this issue to completion with ruthless efficiency months ahead of our wimpy target publication date.

None of this could have happened, however, but for J.T. Green. J.T. could sell snow on the North Pole in December and get rich doing it, but he sure needed his best in August when he embarked on his mission to pry articles out of faculty facing up to the final accreditation hurdle and exploding enrollments.

J.T. was essential to the legal ed team, because with J.T., anything is possible.

J.T. directed this faculty-wide scholarly project so successfully that another issue is almost full. With a substantive hint during one of his signature faculty chit chats or a subtle fan of the competitive flame, J.T. “made articles happen” during a year when “it couldn’t be done.”

Many faculty told us how much they appreciated J.T.’s encouragement to write sometimes very personal and we think possibly painful reflections.

Most admirable is that J.T. cares about the people. So do we.

Experimental, non-traditional, and very unsettling projects invite criticism. It was a transition year for Phoenix Law Review, and its transition was very hard. It was very hard for us.

Yet Phoenix Law Review emerged as a modern, sophisticated, and confident group of very talented and highly trained students with a clear sense of their valuable place in the school.

I (Jennifer) received this note from Gabe as the year drew to a close:

[Law Review] has become a lot more work than I originally thought, but I’m doing things I never thought I would do . . .

. . . [T]here are many issues, but working through those
issues makes the whole experience rewarding. We are the foundation to an institution that will continue forward, hopefully with great success . . . .

The best part: *Oh, also, Law Review IS fun!*³

We took a used-car salesman, an Iowa farm boy, a social worker, a project manager, and a tech dude, and we added change, challenge, determination, despair, hope, love, plenty of our own mistakes, and a whole lot of (rotten bad) luck.

What did we—err . . . *they*—make?

*A work of art.*

Legal Education Team, we salute you! We are proud of you! We are so “glad to be with you . . . here at the end of all things.”⁴

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*Phoenix Law Review*

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Technology Editor, Volume II
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³ Emphasis added.
⁵ Javier Leija was the 2010 winner of Phoenix School of Law’s most prestigious graduation award, the Donald E. Lively Mission Pillar Award, in large part for his extraordinary dedication to the members of *Phoenix Law Review*. 