

## SUCCESSFULLY SERVING AGRICULTURAL CLIENTS

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Presented at the 22<sup>nd</sup> Annual Educational Symposium  
of the American Agricultural Law Association  
October 12, 2001  
Colorado Springs, Colorado

This is America—a town of a few thousand, in a region of wheat and corn and dairies and little groves.

The town is, in our tale, called “Gopher Prairie, Minnesota.” But its Main Street is the continuation of Main Streets everywhere. The story would be the same in Ohio or Montana, in Kansas or Kentucky or Illinois, and not very differently would it be told Up York State or in the Carolina hills.

Main Street is the climax of civilization. That this Ford car might stand in front of the Bon Ton Store, Hannibal invaded Rome and Erasmus wrote in Oxford cloisters. What Ole Jenson the grocer says to Ezra Stowbody the banker is the new law for London, Prague, and the unprofitable isles of the sea; whatsoever Ezra does not know and sanction, that thing is heresy, worthless for knowing and wicked to consider.

Our railway station is the final aspiration of architecture. Sam Clark’s annual hardware turnover is the envy of the four counties which constitute God’s Country. In the sensitive art of the Rosebud Movie Palace there is a Message, and humor strictly moral.

Such is our comfortable tradition and sure faith. Would he not betray himself an alien cynic who should otherwise portray Main Street, or distress the citizens by speculating whether there may not be other faiths?

SINCLAIR LEWIS, *MAIN STREET* (1920)

I learned this at least by my experiment; that if one advances confidently in the direction of his dreams, and endeavors to live that life which he has imagined, he will meet with a success unexpected in common hours. He will put some things behind, will pass an invisible boundary; new, universal, and more liberal laws will begin to establish themselves around and within him. If you have built castles in the air, your work need not be lost; that is where they should be. Now put the foundations under them.

HENRY THOREAU, *WALDEN* (1854)

## **INTRODUCTION**

What sharper contrast can there be to Thoreau's idealism than Sinclair Lewis's barbed portrait of Gopher Prairie, Minnesota? *Main Street* shattered the myth of the American Middle West as God's Country and became a symbol of the cultural narrow-mindedness and smug complacency of small towns everywhere. I offer these literary passages because I believe they are relevant to the topic at hand. I will cover the subject, "Successfully Serving Agricultural Clients: Managing a Financially Sound Practice" broadly, concentrating on how a rural law practice operates and how country lawyers get paid.

The reader should know that this paper is a lot more personal than that typically presented for CLE. It is filled with my observations from the only perspective I have to offer on the topic. By describing the place where I am, you, the reader, may judge for yourself what works for me within the context of the clients and area served by our law firm for 105 years.

## **LAND TO BUILD A DREAM ON**

I was born and raised in Lakefield, Minnesota, and except for college, have spent my entire life here. Lakefield is located in the geographic center of Jackson County, which is on the border of Iowa and seventy-five miles east of the South Dakota border. Jackson County's 11,655 inhabitants occupy six small towns and twenty townships with thirty-six sections of land in each, 449,280 acres or 702 square miles. Within its boundaries are 850 farms. Over eighty-seven percent of its surface area is under cultivation. Our land is remote, rural, declining in population and aging.

Formerly covered with tall grass prairie, the land is flat to gently rolling; potholes and sloughs have been drained into the rivers and lakes. The soil is rich and fertile. Early settlers left the area during Indian attacks; settlement resumed in 1865. The pioneers, in their order of arrival, were Scandinavians (mostly Norwegians), a few English and Irish, more Germans than all others, and a significant number of Bohemians, Czechs, and Slovaks.

The towns provide farm services and market outlets. The three largest towns are: Jackson, pop. 3,501; Lakefield, pop. 1,721 and Heron Lake, pop. 768. Today, many descendants of the original settlers farm this land. The principal crops are corn and soybeans. Corn yields are in excess of 170 bushels per acre and beans average fifty bushels per acre. Hogs in confinement buildings are the major livestock operations.

When I was a youngster a typical farm was 80 or 160 acres; today the average is a section. In 1940, one in four Americans lived on farms. In the dominant culture of the United States today, few are farm dwellers; however, where I practice, forty percent of the people live on farms and population density is sixteen people per square mile.

## **CASTLES IN THE AIR**

I wanted to be a lawyer since I was in grade school. I dreamed of practicing law on Main Street, Lakefield, Minnesota. A neighbor, Judge Harvey A. Holtan, encouraged me even though he thought a person needed a fairly thick skin to practice law in one's own small hometown. Each year of success, he warned, brought as many foes as friends. From his office above the Farmers State Bank on Main Street he met with people who came to him seeking advice. He told his clients what they needed to do, he accomplished what they sought done, and he charged for his services. This was something I wanted to do. This was something that Abraham Lincoln did. Law was to me a noble profession, a service and a calling.

While I was planning my future, some of my classmates from the country were planning theirs in 4-H and Future Farmers of America. There was never a time in their lives when they doubted that they would farm. Today these friends, former classmates and neighbors are living out their life's dream, doing the only thing they ever wanted to do—farming.

### **A FOUNDATION UNDER A DREAM**

Twenty-four years ago, at age twenty-four, I started practicing law in the firm of Muir, Lundblad, Meyer, Storey, Stier and Simons. Twelve years later I was the senior partner. The law firm, now Muir, Costello & Carlson LLP, was founded in 1896, during Lakefield's second decade. Since 1912 it has had an office in Jackson, Minnesota. Between 1952 and 1981, it grew from a two lawyer firm to nine lawyers. Today, I am one of three partners in this law firm with offices in Lakefield, Jackson and, more recently, Heron Lake, Minnesota.

### **FARMING TODAY**

Agriculture is changing rapidly. Biotechnology, precision-farming that involves on-board computer monitoring guided by global positioning systems, information technology and the changing structure of production have collectively altered farming. Farmers must deal with environmental issues such as erosion, water, pests, and the use of organic and inorganic fertilizer. As profit margins tighten, the scale of operations must grow to remain the main source of family income. One interpretation of this "technology treadmill" holds that farmers must adopt the new cost-saving and yield-enhancing technologies just to stay even. Those that fail to keep up with technology will be run off the treadmill as neighbors, the farmers in the next state, or competitors around the world keep running. These profound changes seem as assaults upon the traditional values associated with the occupation of farming.

### **THINGS AS THEY SHOULD BE: JEFFERSONIAN IDEALISM, WILLIAM JENNINGS BRYAN AND PAARLBERG'S AGRICULTURAL CREED**

Jeffersonian Democracy is based on the belief that "Those who labor in the earth are the chosen people of God." The farmer was the basis of all wealth and the bastion of democratic ideals. Jefferson wrote that independent, self-sufficient, tolerant and educated landholders provided the best protection for liberty and had "substantial and genuine virtue." Jefferson excoriated urbanization, likening the "mobs of great cities" to "sores" on the human body.

"Burn down your cities and leave our farms and your cities will  
spring up again as if by magic; but destroy our farms and grass  
will grow in the streets of every city in the country"

WILLIAM JENNINGS BRYAN

Professor Donald Paarlberg, in 1980 (after 100 years of industrialization in the agricultural sector, after the loss of the large number of farms in the mid-1950's and just prior to the great farm credit disaster and resulting deflation in agricultural asset values causing major contraction in the number of farmers), provides us with his wonderful Agricultural Creed:

*Farmers are good citizens and a high percentage of our population should be on farms.  
Farming is not only a business, but also a way of life.*

*Farming should be a family enterprise.  
The land should be owned by the man who tills it.  
It is good to "make two blades of grass grow where only one grew before."  
Anyone who wants to farm should be free to do so.  
A farmer should be his own boss.*

It is within antithetical competing societal truths; i.e., traditional concepts of an agrarian society and profound technological change, that I practice law. With the very structure of agriculture being tested, my community believes in Jefferson's ideas. But we are not Luddites. Law and agriculture have experienced extraordinary fast technological changes to which we must accommodate. It is a difficult balancing act. Upholding traditional ethics of stewardship, community and professionalism are challenges on another level. We are left to ponder whether the traditional values of rural America can resist the onslaught of globalized agricultural production. However, I maintain that making a living in these vocations can best be enjoyed by those whose fondness for the values of the past surpasses their urge to join the rest of those who are plunging into the future not knowing if such a life can satisfy the spirit and soul.

## **THE RURAL LAW PRACTICE**

### **Our Firm**

I am surprised how interested people are when I tell them I am the only lawyer in a small rural community. They have little concept of the relatively small number of people in Jackson County served by relatively few lawyers. They wonder what kind of law we practice and whether we make a good living. They want to know: what my office is like; how we recruit and retain talent; how the firm is organized; who are our clients; how we bill and how we determine fees; and how we avoid conflicts. I may try to keep this type of practice a secret but, typically, they ask for a full description.

### ***The Office***

My office, barely a city block from my home, is in a 25-foot wide and 100-foot deep converted storefront on Main Street. The space easily accommodates two lawyers and a staff of four. All of the public areas of the office are uncluttered, bright and decorated with local artifacts. My own office is full of framed certificates, Italian car parts, old German radios, travel souvenirs, pictures of ancestors, traditional children's toys, odd furniture and various things that I bring from home. It is designed as an intimate setting with a thick area rug over a light oak hardwood floor. The formal office is walnut paneled and looks more like a Senate hearing room than an office. It is big enough for large meetings but it is too intimidating for meeting a single client. Both offices have fireplaces and a garden atrium beyond sets of bay windows.

### ***Associates***

Hiring professionals to a rural area has proven difficult. We recruit from highly regarded Midwest law schools. After two years an associate may be awarded a partnership share without having to buy into the firm. Thereafter their fortune will rise and fall with ours. This arrangement has proven attractive to the type of person who is entrepreneurial and confident they will be able to practice law in league with the partners. Associates are (when we have them) expected to consult with partners in an ongoing fashion about what they are doing and the progress of their work. Any lawyer working for the firm should give their client substantially the same advice that a senior partner would give. Of the last five associates hired, only one has become a partner and another remains "of counsel". In my opinion, the other three

failed to take to the demands of rigorous training and excellence. They graduated at the top of their classes, had rural backgrounds and talent to spare. Pay and benefits were not issues in their departures.

### ***Secretaries***

Our support staff is of extraordinary value. Recently seven past and current employees of the law firm counted 225 years of combined length of employment with us. Their institutional knowledge is incredible. I have two secretaries. One serves as receptionist and the other as the probate assistant. When we do hire, we hire for intelligence, academic achievement and then experience. I have asked the employees why they are so kind, forgiving and loyal to me in spite of all that I have put them through—in a word, they reply, “appreciation”. I tell them frequently that I am thankful for all they do for me. On Friday as they leave for their two days away from the office, they are thanked for what they did in the past week that was particularly good. Then I say, “thank you” a few more times. Recognition of fine work is extremely important to everyone. The staff keeps me well informed of illnesses, deaths, births, and events in the community of importance to my practice. I encourage them to have initiative and I am quite comfortable delegating tasks that need only to be reviewed and not supervised. Their training and experience permit me to get more done in a day than would otherwise be possible.

### ***Technology in our Law Office***

We have five PC desktops and a notebook docking station that are connected to an NT server and the Internet. We use Amicus, Word, HotDocs, PC Law Jr. and some proprietary legal forms with satisfaction. We subscribe to Westlaw. Access to legal research sources has never been better. We are no longer adding twenty thousand dollars of law books to our library shelves each year as we did in the past. The use of new office equipment has increased the quality of legal research, the efficiency of document preparation and the skills of our staff.

### ***Partners***

Decisions for the firm are made by consensus. Each partner holds a veto power. Subject to year-end adjustments, the partnership percentage shares are set for two-year periods. The partner with the highest percentage is expected to give up points to the more junior partners. Unanimity can from time to time be difficult to achieve, but on balance, it works for us. The partners talk to one another by telephone daily. We try to meet for lunch every couple of weeks. The financial status of the firm is reviewed annually and each month a financial report is prepared and circulated. We do not prepare an annual budget. We feel, given our size, one is unnecessary, and that the annual and monthly reports provide us with sufficient information and flexibility. Our firm’s focus is on generating revenue, rather than cutting expenses. While we monitor and review expenses, our experience has shown expenses to be relatively fixed. A number of times I have personally decided there is something about the way the office is being run that should be changed. As often as not I am reminded that changes in process will do little or nothing to change those things that we need to do for the client and accomplish the results.

My two partners try cases and one handles appeals. Formerly I did the major work for our bank clients; my partners took the bankruptcy claims. We all practice in the areas of real estate and probate. We serve as City Attorney for some area towns. One of our partners is an active Navy JAG officer. As part of the general practice, we serve as appointed counsel for the indigents, volunteer for legal aid and hold leadership positions with the bar association. We have not obtained certification in any of the recognized specialties. Each partner has areas of greater concentration.

We are deliberative and tradition bound, mainly dealing with routine legal work that is somewhat repetitive. New matters can be accepted in formerly unfamiliar and unknown areas of law because of the vast research capacity now available. Our experience, when aided by consultation among us, produces fairly good judgment in most matters.

The current partners have not had an ethical complaint or a malpractice claim made against them. The inherited values passed down in the law firm have been our best protection against complaints, claims, and problems with clients.

### **Serving Our Clients**

Farmers, as place-bound people, have provided our client base. Farming accounts for the extended family of uncles, aunts, and cousins, with parents, grandparents and siblings living close by. Our clients are often related to one another. Knowing generations of families and becoming involved in their conflicts throughout the years is inevitable. Sometimes, I am meeting the fourth and fifth generations and know a great deal about their ancestors. Given this generational intimacy, I often know what will work and what will not, what advice will be well received and what will not. Knowing the ethnicity or religion of a client may provide some of the same advantage. Seeing old school mates upon the death of their parents is commonplace. Being with clients at their deathbed is sometimes required. These are my neighbors, fellow church members, old friends, and even old enemies. I try to take into account, be sensitive to or merely accept views on diverse topics of religion, education, politics, and so forth.

Our clients are adherents to the traditions of the community and all the virtues that farming represents. The country lawyer must be cognizant of these values while being professionally competent to advise a client in the realities of the present day. The last forty years have seen the price of prime Jackson County farmland increase ten fold and most of the increase has come within the last twenty-five years. In addition, it is noteworthy to mention that longevity is very high among our population. What with depression era spending and savings habits, the magic of compound interest doubling savings over the decades and the fact that the major form of wealth is immovable, the law firm handles a disproportionately high number of taxable estates. Such developments require competence on the part of the farmers' lawyer in areas formerly the domain of the lawyer who advised the wealthy. Examples of this are estate planning, choice of business entity, transfer of farm assets to the next generation and the myriad problems of finance and others. These are complicated, highly technical areas that are ever changing. If one is to advise the farmer client well, one must master the subjects and their considerable progeny. The farmer client is bound by a plethora of laws and regulations complex and confusing. Competent representation requires legal knowledge, skill, thoroughness and preparation.

The role of the lawyer as an advisor is of much greater importance in the daily rural practice. Typical of transactional practices, we are frequently acting as the client's advisor and less frequently as an intermediary or advocate. The importance and relevance of both parts of the rule on "counselor as advisor" make the rule worth quoting:

#### Rule 2.1 Counselor as Advisor

In representing a client, a lawyer shall exercise independent professional judgment and render candid advice. In rendering advice, a lawyer may refer not only to law but to the other considerations such as moral, economic, social and political factors, that may be relevant to the client's situation.

Occasionally, a client comes in with a legitimate grievance against a neighbor or relative. I tell them they have every right to legal recourse and I will champion their cause, if they so choose. In such a battle I may be bullet proof but they possibly are not. I am obligated to counsel on the likely outcome of their decision. It could result, at the very least, in this person never speaking to them again. This can be

extremely uncomfortable and hurtful since we all see one another again and again on the street, picking up mail at the post office, shopping in stores and attending churches and community events.

In simple transactions and many family transactions, clients routinely waive confidentiality and consent to multiple party representation in the interests of cost and expediency. Potential conflicts of interest are disclosed and clients are told if we can no longer represent their interests. Because of the high level of trust among those involved in a transaction, warnings to unrepresented parties to seek independent advice are often ignored.

### **Managing A Sound Practice**

The occasions for the farmer to consult his lawyer are frequent. Answers and solutions are needed. It will cost some money. If our advice is relevant to the situation or our solution to problems effective, the client will pay the fee and will return; if to the contrary, the client will go elsewhere.

Here, I will review how I am hired, garner repeat business and referrals, and the manner in which I bill clients. I think this will give you some insight into how a rural law practice operates and how country lawyers get paid.

#### ***Getting hired***

One of the earliest and most valuable things I was taught by a senior partner was that you could fire your clients. Retaining the service of a lawyer is a two-way decision. The client, considering various factors, offers employment to the lawyer as a knowledgeable servant who can accept or decline the offer of employment. The lawyer may usually quit at any time there is a reason, such as nonpayment or incompatibility, or any time, so long as the loss of services would not harm or threaten the client. The client can dismiss the lawyer at any time. Serving the client is easiest when the goals the client wishes to achieve are acceptable to the lawyer and the parties value one another. All people are seeking respect and understanding. Not all are equally deserving of respect and understanding. I help these to find another lawyer. Only those who value a lawyer's advice should become clients.

#### ***Getting repeat business and referrals***

A surgeon said that his patients rated him by what they could most easily know about him: availability, affability and ability. A lawyer's clients surely use the same ranking and order. Do not underestimate their contribution to loyalty.

I am an impatient person who does not like to wait for an appointment, does not like being put on hold and does not like having calls screened. For me, being punctual is simply doing unto others as I would have them do unto me. Taking all telephone calls, returning all telephone calls right away, and being in the office at all times during regular office hours are how lawyers can best meet their clients' expectations and needs. Clients want to be able to consult with their lawyer when advice is needed. I also want to be easily approachable and available to those who are not clients but may need my services.

I generally like most of my clients and am genuinely interested in them. If you have never been one who ignored or avoided a client and if you performed tasks for the client with reasonable promptness you can be reasonably sure your clients will be pleased. Be prompt and be courteous – try to treat all people equally well. Clients will know you care.

Do not be condescending in words, tone or attitude but do show confidence. Demonstrate you are reliable. A client needs that assurance.

Stay on top of your game. Complacency in your continuing education will certainly lead to trouble. Tailor your CLE to fill in the gaps and get up to speed on areas where you may be getting rusty. Increase your ability to handle new issues. A partner who was demanding and an excellent mentor hired me – he was competitive and wanted us to be our best. He was nearly driven mad by an old partner who asked about the “new law on chattel mortgages” some 20 years after the enactment of Article 9 of the UCC. For your sake, as your duty to your clients and as an honor to our profession, learning must continue if we are to be responsible in giving advice to clients.

I don't deny that keeping up a good reputation can be self-serving. Out of town friends and relatives of various public officials were becoming my clients. I have also found that I receive referrals from other lawyers in our area. I know these matters are referred, for the most part because of our reputation, but amicability does no harm.

### ***Getting Paid***

I have found the way to get paid is to tell the client their bill will be “fair and reasonable” but if they do not think that it is, they should not pay it. Instead of paying and grumbling, they should come in and discuss the fee charged or any other dissatisfaction.

I tell clients we charge competitive rates for the type and quality of services we provide. In many instances I can provide specific price quotes or a fairly accurate estimation of the range.

In determining the reasonableness of attorney fees, consideration is given to all the following factors:

1. The time and labor required.
2. The experience and knowledge of the attorney
3. The complexity and novelty of the problems involved
4. The extent of the responsibility assumed and the results obtained; and
5. The sufficiency of the assets properly available to pay for the services.

Clients are very accepting of this type of arrangement particularly when the maximum amount to be charged is stated.

This method is only slightly different than the more involved traditional factors: (1) the time and labor required, the novelty and difficulty of the questions involved and the skill requisite to perform the legal service properly; (2) the likelihood, if apparent to the client, that the acceptance of the particular employment will preclude other employment by the lawyer; (3) the fee customarily charged in the locality for similar legal services, (4) the amount involved and the results obtained, (5) the time limitations imposed by the client or by the circumstances, (6) the nature and length of the professional relationship with the client, (7) the experience, reputation and ability of the lawyer performing the services; and (8) whether the fee is fixed or contingent.

The billable hourly rate is still used for some matters, but not many. The hourly rate is not useful in determining the value of most legal services our firm provides. Secondly and more importantly, a quote of an hourly rate is upsetting to the client. It is hard for a farmer to believe that anyone is worth my hourly rate, which is the hourly rate prevailing for lawyers of my experience in the area. The hourly rate means



that the faster I work on a matter, the less I get paid. The hourly rate ignores efficiency and experience. It does not always cover the overhead since our trained secretaries accomplish so many things. Secretaries do not use timesheets to record their time spent and consequently we do not bill for staff time. Further, we do not itemize nor bill for long distance telephone calls, faxes, copies or postage. If I have an idea of how much work will be necessary, I normally quote a flat fee. Very, very seldom have I had any complaints.

There have been times I have asked a client to pay an amount in excess of a previously agreed upon amount. However, I make it very clear I am merely asking the client to consider paying an additional amount that is fair and I will not require additional payment. This works.

In other instances, I have not pursued payment. Once a client did not pay for a promissory note and mortgage we prepared because his daughter-in-law refused to sign the documents. I thought his actions were like being excused from paying for food ordered but not eaten. My partners said I should forget it. Except for that incident, this man has been a good client since.

At the conclusion of the task the client will be called upon to pay my fee. The client does this much more easily when they have been given an idea of the substantial services performed. The client should know one does not get from here to the desired result by some act of legerdemain. Whenever appropriate, I explain, insofar as I can, in non-technical language, what it is I will be doing. Much of what we do is technical and arcane. However when stripped of legal cant and Latin expressions it can be understood by the uninitiated.

### ***A Secure Future***

It is enjoyable and rewarding to serve the legal needs of our clients. It will continue to be so for me, my partners and future partners, for many years to come. These lawyers will be preparing wills and trusts; forming partnerships, corporations, LLCs, LLPs, and limited partnerships; placing minors and adults under conservatorships and guardianships; probating decedents' estates and administering trusts; filing federal estate and gift tax returns; preparing farm leases, deeds, mortgages and contracts for deed; examining abstracts of title and rendering title opinions; advising boards, fiduciaries, and public officials; prosecuting and defending misdemeanors; handling divorces; preparing prenuptial agreements; petitioning for adoptions; handling farm and residential real estate closings; drafting drainage easements; enforcing security agreements; foreclosing mortgages; collateralizing loans and preparing promissory notes; handling administrative appeals; writing legal briefs; trying lawsuits; filing mechanic liens; applying for extraordinary writs; attending arbitration and mediation sessions; and further serving the good people of Jackson County, Minnesota.

## **THE COMMUNITY IN WHICH WE LIVE**

### **Community Service**

The law firm does not have any expectations of what partners should do outside the office. We join the corn and soybean growers, pork producers, lamb and wool, and cattle organizations. We join commercial clubs, service organizations, veterans' clubs, bowling or golf leagues, community and environmental improvement associations and the like. We volunteer at schools, give speeches at commemorations, teach adult extension classes, and generally perform our civic duties. We are active in our churches, we attend local sporting and cultural events, we contribute to charities and fund drives, and we serve on local government boards. We understand, by virtue of our education and economic status, we are leaders in the community. Our opinions are sought on many topics. At the same time demands are made upon us to

volunteer leadership, we must avoid saying and doing things that might be perceived as acting superior. With such a small population each person is important and makes a difference in making things happen. This can be busy, wearing and demanding; few are required to do much.

It is expected that we take time for friendships, family activities and community participation. These needs are met and obligations reciprocated, yet it can be hard, being in possession of so many accurate details, confidences and secrets concerning our neighbors. A lawyer in a small town must avoid certain places where gossip is prevalent.

### **Relationships with Peers and Public Servants**

I recognized early the real secret of success was to behave in the same manner as those members of the profession I most admired. No one heard of incivility or a lack of professionalism among these lawyers. They were respected if they were competent and did not procrastinate. They were often helpful and easy to deal with. Collegiality within this profession has been replaced with envy and malice in too many instances. Although lawyers new to the area are a rare event, I telephone them soon after their arrival to welcome them and find out things about them. I help judges, elected public officials and government workers look good at what they do, prod them to make better decisions and recognize their service to the community. We need to work with these people and our paths cross many times.

### **“Our Comfortable Tradition and Sure Faith”**

This is a land that is self-conscious about its values and readily embraces an ideology of specialness to justify its existence to the dominant culture of America. No one here would disagree with William Jennings Bryan. We feed America. Furthermore, we produce safe food for the whole world at the lowest cost. We do this in our own Eden.

This is a place where your life is not your own. There is no anonymity and little privacy. Social and political skills are at a premium to balance the interests of those who depend on each other over a lifetime. It is a community that is self-conscious and feels vulnerable to judgments, gossip, and public opinion as people judge their own worth by their neighbor and their neighbor's opinions. Here social harmony and peace are kept despite the personal costs involved.

This does not mean we are afraid to speak out against the status quo, indeed we do, but we must weigh each occasion and choose our battles wisely. A great amount of time is spent reflecting on experience or in dialogue with others. Individuality and competitive striving that pushes us toward excellence in our careers can and must be consistent with our sense of social responsibility. It is not necessary, or warranted, for the talented to leave the small town for success as Sinclair Lewis would have us believe. Herein lies Walden Pond in the midst of Gopher Prairie, and she is better for it.

In closing, I paraphrase Carol Kennicott, the central figure of the novel, *Main Street*:

“But I have won this: I’ve never excused my failures by sneering at my aspirations, by pretending to have gone beyond them. I do not admit that Main Street is as beautiful as it should be! I do not admit that Gopher Prairies is greater or more generous than Europe! *I do not admit that practicing law is enough to satisfy all people!* I may not have fought the good fight, but I have kept the faith.”