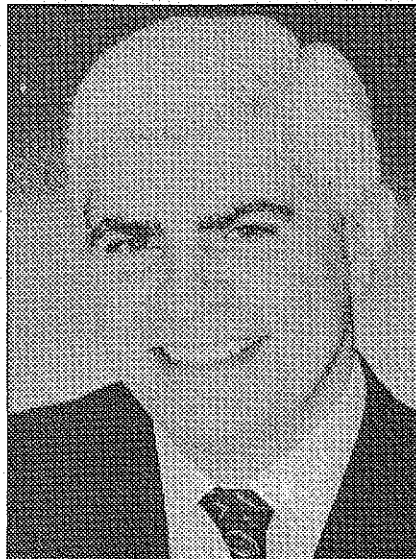


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'Proud To Be A Lawyer'



"I am certainly very proud to be an American lawyer," said Michael Miller, Esq., president of the New York County Lawyers' Association in lower Manhattan. Miller (above) devoted six weeks following the 9/11 attacks to recruit and coordinate volunteer lawyers to assist victims' families in obtaining death certificates. From one war zone to the next, Miller also served as an election supervisor in Bosnia's first election after its civil war. See Susan Master's "Daily Bulletin" story on page 8, the first in an up-

Spotlight on a Bar Association President

Michael Miller, Esq — New York County Lawyers Association

By Susan Master, Esq.
Brooklyn Daily Eagle

VESEY STREET — With the upcoming anniversary of the September 11th terrorist attacks, it seems appropriate to begin a segment of bar association president interviews with a glimpse into the pro bono work of Michael Miller, Esq., who leads the New York County Lawyers Association (NYCLA).

NYCLA is housed in a magnificent 72 year old edifice at 14 Vesey Street, which escaped harm in the shadow of disaster, being diagonally across the street from the World Trade Center. The aftermath of the disaster caused the temporary closure of the building and the brutal upheaval of the lives and businesses of many of its members.

"I have a history of trying to help those in need," said Miller, a graduate from New York Law School. "This was a special opportunity for us lawyers who were uniquely qualified to help," he said.

The Impetus to Change the Law And Help Survivors

The trusts and estates attorney said that he was "aware of and sensitive to the legal issues that we were confronted with."

"We recognized that once we got past the first few days of the crisis, there would be a great challenge to get death certificates," he said, adding that "it takes months."

Miller explained that without a

body, there are a lot of issues to deal with to make sure that there is no fraud involved. There were the possibilities that the missing person was in a coma, suffered from amnesia, or was roaming the streets.

"The law required certain protocols to make certain that there was indeed a missing person and that every avenue was investigated," said Miller about the "due diligence" requirement. "The court then appoints a guardian ad litem to investigate and make a report, which takes months and costs the petitioner a lot of money."

"We tried to develop an expedited method while still protecting the interests of the missing person and survivors," said Miller.

Miller recounted "overwhelmingly sad stories" he heard from relatives who got phone calls from within the doomed towers. One came from the glass enclosed 76th floor trading room, which had a "magnificent view" of what was coming.

He said that there was grief counseling to help people move along, but "although we were somewhat prepared, one can't be prepared for the avalanche of sadness."

"The experience is still percolating," said Miller about the post traumatic stress disorder of the relief workers.

"Being a bar leader, I identified an area where I could be of assistance," said Miller. "By government executive order, the law relating to the process of declaring someone dead was changed."

"I have a rush of pride in the way we lawyers stepped up and did what we could do." Miller noted that it is well documented that lawyers helped "more than most professions," saying

that it was the legal profession's finest hour when 100s of lawyers showed up in 24 hour notice to volunteer to help. He considered those attorneys, ranging from the newly admitted to retired judges, "an army of soldiers doing what we are uniquely qualified to do."

Ballots Instead of Bullets

Besides being noteworthy for rising to the crisis occasion in New York City, in 1996 Miller was one of eight applicants selected by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe to help supervise Bosnia's first free elections after its civil war.

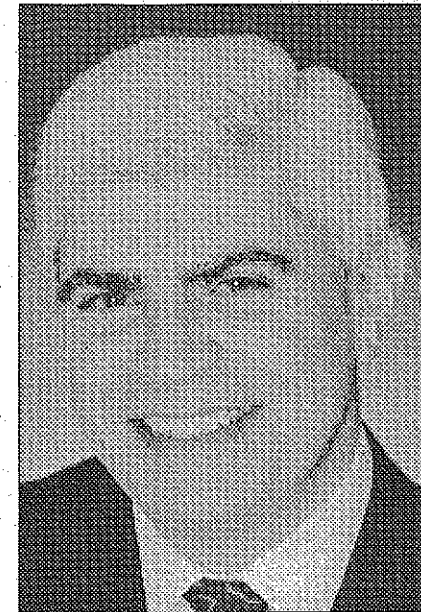
"I have always been interested in elections and politics," said Miller, who said that his wife, Cynthia, "wasn't terribly thrilled with me going to a war zone." She and their daughter and son, then ages 6 and 4, respectively, stayed home.

"The conditions were rough, after four years of brutal warfare," explained Miller. He said that their infrastructure was destroyed, the water made his colleagues very sick, and food was limited. "We were told never to leave the road because there were active land mines around."

"There were physical manifestations of war like bombed out buildings and people without limbs."

"We tried to make some contribution to the peace effort. Our goal was to have free and fair elections." Miller was stationed in the second largest city in Bosnia, next to Sarajevo. He described his colleagues as "an impressive group of people working together." He said there were interesting challenges, but many emotional issues because they saw a lot of painful things.

"Its almost impossible to describe the concept of democracy to people who only understand totalitarianism." He said that the elections after the bat-



Michael Miller, Esq.

tle "helped them move beyond a life filled with the chaos of war."

Universal Lessons

All things considered, especially the history of the legal profession, Miller has distilled an important message or what he calls "universal lessons." They are as follows:

(1) "When things are at their worst, New Yorkers, lawyers, and Americans are at our best."

(2) "There is great nobility in our profession."

He considers the law a noble profession because lawyers were an integral part of the social progress of the last century. "The 20th century has been the greatest in history," he believes, citing as examples women's suffrage, equal rights, voting rights, and civil rights.

"Volunteer lawyers were at the forefront of all of these efforts," said Miller, adding that lawyers made "real contributions in these crises."

"Look at the profession as a whole, its history and social commitment. I am certainly very proud to be an American lawyer."