

## **PACE TESTIMONIAL**

### **Jocelyn Acker, RP**

The paralegal profession is a third career for me. I began my “working” life as a secretary, as I had always excelled in business courses, particularly typing and shorthand with my piano-playing background contributing to my eye-hand coordination. When the opportunity presented itself, I resumed my college education and changed my major from music to business, then to business education. I received my bachelor’s degree in 1970 and then completed a masters in education in 1977. One of my favorite courses to teach in high school was business law, and thus my interest in the legal field began.

In 1989, I had reached the 20<sup>th</sup> year of my teaching career and was also told that I was to be laid off (as I was not on tenure due to having had to move many times). At the same time, my youngest daughter was graduating from high school. I made the decision then to find a different avenue of employment. My interest in the legal profession combined with my business background led me to seek employment as a law office administrator. In my search for this position, I was asked by an attorney if I would consider becoming a paralegal. At that point, my knowledge of the paralegal profession was very limited, and I was not sure if I even “fit” into this profession. The attorney encouraged me, stating that I had the business expertise that he was looking for, along with my background in teaching business law, and he felt that I would fit very nicely into the paralegal role. I accepted the position, fully intending to go back to school and take paralegal courses. However, the attorney actually discouraged me from doing so indicating that he felt that with my master’s degree and my experience with business law, I could learn what I needed to know about being a paralegal with on-the-job training. Consequently, I did not seek any further education.

From the first day of my employment, I became involved with the paralegal association. At that time, Fort Wayne was a satellite chapter of IPA, as there was not sufficient interest yet to fund a separate association. I became very active in IPA, serving as the vice-chair of the Fort Wayne group and then moving to the chair. In the fifth year of my involvement, I suggested that we then had sufficient numbers to start our own paralegal association and thus Northeast Indiana Paralegal Association was formed. I continued to be active in the association, serving as its first president, then treasurer and various other offices. As a primary delegate to NFPA, I became interested in becoming more involved on the national level and made the decision to run for NFPA treasurer/director of finance. I was elected to that position in 2000.

With my involvement in NFPA, I also became increasingly aware of PACE. My initial reaction to sitting for the exam was negative in that I felt that it would not serve to better my position with my current employer. I also felt that my lack of a formal paralegal education would be a detriment to my being able to pass the exam. However, as time went by, I also considered that as a member of the Board of Directors of NFPA, I should show my support for PACE by obtaining the RP designation. I felt that to serve on the board of an organization that supported such an exam and not carry the distinction myself was a form of hypocrisy. Therefore, I made the decision to sit for PACE. I also

looked upon this opportunity as a personal challenge to myself. I felt that I was an effective paralegal, and that in spite of my lack of paralegal education, I had obtained a level of expertise in the profession. Thus, I saw it as a personal challenge to prove that I could pass PACE and carry the distinction of an “advanced competency” paralegal.

The law firm where I worked (Baker & Daniels) formed a PACE study group which met during lunch time. As a litigation paralegal, my work often demanded that I work through lunch, so I made a personal decision not to participate in this group study program. At the time I made the decision to sit for PACE, the study group was finished with their program. I obtained some of the study materials that they had used, purchased a copy of the PACE study manual, and collected my textbooks and materials I had used in teaching business law. My method of choice to prepare myself for the exams was to “cram” with several days of intense studying and then sit for the exam. I felt that this particular method would work better for me than to try to study over an extended period of time and attempt to “retain” the information for months leading up to the exam time. I chose the end of the year 1999, as I had some unused vacation time along with the holiday days off. Starting on a Thursday, I studied intensely through the weekend and then sat for the exam on Tuesday. While this particular method may not work for everyone, it worked for me! I passed the exam on the first attempt.

Passing PACE was a particularly thrilling personal achievement for me! I was able to prove to myself that my dedication to the profession and my eagerness to learn had paid off. My law firm was supportive in that they paid for the study manual and the cost of the exam. They also put my picture and the announcement of my having achieved this distinction in the business section of the newspaper. Passing PACE did not raise my salary or change my position. It did, however, give me a great deal of personal satisfaction. There were some attorneys who expressed their appreciation of my efforts and acknowledged my achievement; however, the firm did not make a “big deal” out of my having passed the test. I received some support from NIPA but at that time, there was not as much information “out there” about PACE and many of the paralegals were not even aware of the test.

I strongly believe that passing PACE should be a prerequisite for any paralegal who sits on the NPFA board, and I also feel that officers of any location association should also sit for the exam. While it might not be feasible to make it a prerequisite for local board officers, I think that it should be strongly recommended in that IPA is a member of NFPA and as such, our board members should be an exemplary model for the members of the profession.

IPA should give its support to all candidates for PACE. Indiana has the distinction of being the second highest state in the country as to the number of RPs. I think we should strive to become NUMBER ONE!

**Jocelyn “Jo” Acker, RP**  
**IPA Treasurer**