

Where is Perry Mason?

By Karen Wooton

What this country needs is an honest lawyer. These showy news whores have no clue what it takes to be a great lawyer. It takes true lawyering to get the guilty person to confess on the stand. I always loved the way Perry did that. They don't do that today. Nobody got OJ to confess—but in Perry's world, OJ would have cracked. Robert Blake, too. Perry, he had the touch.

I used to think I wanted to be Della Street. Working for a fantastic guy like Perry, Della didn't seem to have to do much of anything. She got to hang out and bask in the glory of a great lawyer. Fortunately, I came to my senses; I didn't want to be the assistant—I wanted to be the big shot. There's no glory in making phone calls and bringing in that last little bit of proof at just the right moment. The glory was in the dazzling cross-examination. Lull the key witness into a sense of ease and security then suddenly turn and remind them they were under oath before asking THE question, the one that always caused them to spill their guts. That was for me.

And Perry was always a gentleman when he did it. I, too, could do it with style and finesse. I could. Of course, trying to do it as a woman back in Perry's day had its own challenges. Judges used to throw us lawyers of the female persuasion out of their courtrooms if we wore tailored pantsuits. It was dresses and heels or nothing. I found out that it was hard to extract those cool confessions standing outside the courtroom.

I learned the hard way that while Perry's world was great on TV, nobody ever confesses the witness stand. And in the American legal system, everybody hates defense attorneys: the judges, the DA, and even the clients. Hell, half of all attorneys graduated in the bottom half of their class, and they blatantly demonstrate their incompetence daily.

And guess what? From that same pool of legal brawn are drawn the judges, with matching levels of competence. Once he puts on those robes, a former idiot attorney gets to be treated with respect...even when he throws a woman from the courtroom for wearing a pantsuit.

But the greatest truth I learned is also the most frightening. Too many of these same great legal minds move on to politics where they manage to get elected to office, thus allowing their idiocy to lead us all down the rabbit hole if we let them.