

Reflections on an Anniversary

Exactly 22 years ago today, right here on solosez, I created the COTE acronym and bestowed it upon one rose, jennifer j. I've grown old and senile since then, but thanks to technology (in this instance, my computer calendar), I don't need to remember such things, my computer remembers them for me.

When I saw the reminder, my first thought really wasn't about COTE or me, it was a feeling of marvel that solosez has existed for so long (technically, since some time in 1996) and that it still thrives. There have been births, there have been (too many) deaths. There's been at least one marriage of two people who first encountered each other on solosez. We've celebrated others'successes, commiserated with others' failures. We've survived a controversy or two that came awful close to causing ABA to kill the list.

Most email discussion lists have a truly active lifecycle measured in single digit years. But we persist, thanks in no small part to COTE's iron fist. (I've seen it, it's quite intimidating.)

I've no desire to drone on, folks may or may not add their memories as they may choose. But I thought it remarkable that solosez has lived long and still prospers.

James S. Tyre, California

As an early member (not as early as COTE, Tyre or Bubba from Dime Box), Solosez has been an invaluable resource over the many years from which I've met online and personally a large number of wonderful members who have generously imparted their time, wisdom and experience upon us. Glad it's still going strong.

Craig McLaughlin, California

I discovered this group completely by accident and have learned more than I can say. I know I have participated at least 15 years - well, if participating counts reading and wondering if I would ever know enough not to be dangerous!

Thanks to all for the feeling that I have a safety net on which to rely.

Reta McKannan, Alabama

I was there when COTE was crowned. And I raise my glass to toast her.

It has been amazing to watch all that has transpired here. I joined when I was a law school student and Debbie was the list manager. I give a lot of credit for my professional success to Solosez. As a baby lawyer in a firm I was able to present knowledge and wisdom beyond my

years because of what I learned here, especially for tech and practice management. Now on my own for coming up on 11 years, Solosez has continues to be just a few clicks away. Social media has given the listserv a run for its money (who among us has not sought to click on like and then remembered where you were?), but we have persevered. Here's to many more...

Deborah G. Matthews, Virginia

Yeah, I've been here since either August or Sept. of 1996 and I find it quite amazing that we're still going.

Bear in mind, in 1993 I started law school and Email was still quite new to most people; we had email accounts thru the law school but it involved dialing in via a modem, calling up a Unix shell and invoking PINE to read your email (at least for most people; there may have been some PC email programs but no one I knew had them; I had to teach several younger students how to check their email after our contracts prof insisted on communicating by email).

So, 1996, yeah, there was Windows and graphical browsers (Netscape) but it was still rather novel; and I read in the ABA Journal an article on Solosez; and I signed up shortly after taking the bar exam.

A LOT of people helped me in those first year or two; Chris Menard for one (I don't know what happened to him) Bruce Dorner for another and a lot of others I can't think of off the top of my head. And we've seen deaths here; John Page, but also Kathleen De La Rosa aka Kathleen Coughenor (I really liked Kathleen, she had a wonderful sense of humor) ; that shocked me; as well as Ross Kodner (man, he was awful damn young) and others that I, frankly, will get depressed if I start recounting them.

That's why I try to help people on this list; I got a lot of help, pointers, straight forward advice early on and I try to reciprocate.

Ron Jones, Florida

Deb, I hope you won't mind my sharing a personal story, but it's one of many (many many) that show what a great place this is.

I have no recollection of how Deb became aware that I've been playing roto league baseball forever, or how I became aware that Deb is a huge fan of the Washington Nationals. But, one year, I had then-Nats pitcher Jordan Zimmermann on my roto team. Deb knew that, and happened to be at a game that was a JZimm bobblehead giveaway game. A few weeks later, a mysterious package arrived in the mail, it was the JZimm bobblehead!

Though JZimm is but a shadow of his former self, and hasn't been a Nat for years, I still have it where I see it every day. Deb being the amazing person that she is, the bobblehead is possibly the best unexpected gift I've ever gotten from anyone!

James S. Tyre

Jim, you are one of my all-stars!

There are a hundred million similar stories. My DD and I went to Coeur d'Alene to attend a cousin's wedding. I had something that suddenly had to be printed, signed, and faxed while there. Art Macomber kindly permitted me to use his office and I made my deadline. Then as we tried to fly home we ran into travel hell (there may be those family members who would tell you that one flies with me at one's own risk). We dropped my sis and family off for their early flight, checked on our flight, and went to Spokane to see the rapids featured in some odd movie my daughter loved.

Got back to the airport and found our flight was cancelled due to an air show - you know, those special events one would have to arrange with the FAA well in advance of the date. We waited and waited to get a flight out and in the process missed our connecting flight. Rather than a two stop layover plan, we opted for one long layover in Seattle. I called Mark Stern to ask where we might eat given our multi-hour layover. He said if we'd wait for him to take his dogs home from his sailboat that he would come pick us up. He took us to a lovely place near Pike Place Market - and he treated us. Of course when Marc needed his justice bobblehead picked up from George Mason University here I went over, picked it up, and shipped it to him for a couple of years. And there's when I was at the National Solo and Small Firm Conference in Santa Fe and Marc gave me a ride to Albuquerque. With that, I shall stop and let someone else carry the tales forward...

Deb Matthews

I haven't been on this list as long as many of you and I am not quite as active on this list these days but I still appreciate the support and camaraderie this list provides. Thank you to COTE for the many years of herding us cats.

Naomi C. Fujimoto, Hawaii

I still come back here for answers. And I miss Ross, too. And John Page. I still have e-mails from both of them.

Oh, and I trimmed the message. You're welcome, COTE. :)

Gregory Zbylut, California

Damn. Maybe folks are trainable. Well done, Greg. May many others follow your fine lead.

Deborah G. Matthews

I don't remember the controversies, but I love reading y'all's stories! I'm glad we're all still here.

Marilou Auer, retired legal clerk/secretary, Virginia

I'm not sure when I joined, but I know I was here for Bush v. Gore. I miss stories from Dime Box.

Anthony S. Alpert, California

You Sezzers gave me several years of my favorite task at the ABA Journal -- writing the Solo Network column. I could always find somebody here to interview, no matter the topic. You all were always very generous with your time. Since I went back to practicing law, you've helped many times too.

And yes, CJ, I'm sorry about the photog they sent to photograph you. I know. He was a demanding twit. Sorry, again, 15+ years later. ;)

Meg Tebo, Illinois

I have been here since 2008, and I still wonder when I will know enough to give more advice than I ask for. I am not as active as some, but I am eternally grateful for what I have learned from this list.

I also want to say that I really like that we can discuss off-topic things. All my local listservs prohibit off-topic discussions. But it really is nice to be able to ask for travel suggestions, computer advice etc.

Brian C. Hagner, Wisconsin

Don't forget the Great Cast Iron Pan Thread. Who knew people had such strong feelings about cast iron?

Naomi C. Fujimoto

Solosez has been a huge part of my enjoyment of solo practice. It is a place where there are others who understand the strange world of being a solo, and who have overcome the same problems that I have. I have learned so much. It is also a place where camaraderie and collegiality are paramount.

Just want to say, thanks to everyone who is part of Solosez, thanks to COTE, and thanks to Jim for noting the anniversary!

Caroline A. Edwards, Pennsylvania

Well, let's see. I joined this fun fun group in December 1996 just as I was opening my own practice. The amount of support at that time was amazing and heartening. It was here that I realized I wasn't the only 2nd career lawyer in the world and that life did not revolve around Big Law. I still have many of the old jokes and threads (remember I compiled the "thread of the month" for several years).

So who remembers the toilet paper hanging controversy? or Word vs WordPerfect? I still have the Clinton/Lewinsky jokes saved somewhere (but they have not aged well have they?). Bubba, DimeBox, Yolanda Mae? Still, one of the best illustrations of how we all pulled together was helping Andy S get re-married by double proxy.

Anyway, Happy Birthday COTE

David Kaufman, Florida

Jim, you are part of the soul of SoloSez.

Wendy Lascher, California

I'll pick up that story for the newbies on the list. I posted the historical retrospective (below) in 2011 (now updated to 2019) when someone was collecting favorite stories about Solosez and mentioned my travails.

The story began 17 years ago. On January 5, 2002, we held our daughter Rosie for the first time. She was 10 weeks old at the time and we were

adopting her from Guatemala. We were in Guatemala, and only scheduled to have temporary custody of Rosie for three days, at which time we were returning to St. Croix to wait out the adoption process, which typically averaged 7-8 months. But while we were there, our adoption agency told us that we were so far along in the process, that we would be done by the end of January. It made no sense to fly back and return in only three weeks, especially when Robin could stay with Rosie the whole time. Soooooo, we made arrangements for Robin to stay with Rosie for the remaining three weeks and I returned to St. Croix since I had to work and had two trials starting up at the end of January.

I no sooner got back to St. Croix than we were informed that there was a hitch. We knew we were adopting when we got married, so we had followed the required formalities for the adoption, which was that our Italian marriage certificate had to be certified by the clerk of court for the town. This certificate was submitted to the Guatemalan embassy in D.C. which approved it and sent it down to Guatemala. Unfortunately, some bureaucrat in Guatemala (three months later) decided that the certificate had to be certified by the region (Milan) and the national government in Rome. (Imagine trying to get your marriage certificate certified by some regional authority and then the State Department in D.C. -- then imagine doing that in Italy, famed for its 4 hour government work days, random job actions, etc.)

I immediately got our wedding planner in Italy working on it but she said it could take months. So I started working on Plan B -- re-marry Robin and use a new marriage certificate from the states. But, since Robin was in Guatemala with Rosie (Guatemala had a six week period for advertising the marriage before you could marry, so flying back there was out of the

question), I looked into a proxy marriage. (I was familiar with this because my USMC brother had been the proxy for his best friend, also a Marine, who was in Iraq in the first Iraq war and needed to marry his immigrant wife before her visa expired.)

I reached out to Solosez to find out which states recognized proxy marriages and find people who might stand in for us. The response from the list was incredible as people offered solutions and information about their states' respective laws. As it turned out, no state would allow a proxy marriage where both people had proxies. And I had those trials starting up, so I couldn't go to the states. But, I had found out that Texas recognized proxy marriages and would allow you to get married without photo ID. The Texas contingent of Soloszezers were all over this and I specifically recall Darrell Stewart and Beckie Fahie helping with ideas. (I'm focused on Texas, but there were responses from all over the Solosez world.)

There was a lawyer here in the Virgin Islands who split his time between here and Texas and he was heading back to Texas. So I arranged for him to pretend to be me (remember, no photo ID made this work) and his wife to be my wife's proxy. My only condition was that he make sure that he get a wedding photo -- both he and his wife are black and my wife and I are both white!

Was it fraud? Perhaps. But since my wife and I were already married, could it really be fraud?

Fortunately (or unfortunately, depending upon your point of view), we never found out. The day before "I" was to leave for Texas, our wedding planner emailed and said that, miraculously, she had obtained the needed Italian

certifications (in only two weeks' time), and they were en route via overnight courier to Guatemala.

That two-week delay had a domino effect upon the processing of the adoption. It was not until March 31 that the adoption was completed and we were able to bring Rosie home. Robin stayed there the whole time -- not something we would have planned in advance; but, in retrospect, it was a great opportunity for her to bond with Rosie, learn Spanish, and become far more acquainted with Rosie's native country and its people. We fell in love with both.

FYI, I joined Solosez shortly after starting my practice as a solo in early 2000. So the response I got from Solosez to someone who had only been on the list for two years at the time was truly awesome.

I really regret that the fake marriage didn't happen. I would love to have that wedding photo on my photo table.

And Rosei (that's how she spells it now) is now 17. My future Latin American dictator (so named because of her fiery temper and willfulness as an 8 year old) will be 18 in October. Still spirited, but a joy to be with.

Andy Simpson, U.S. Virgin Islands

I remember those days so well. How on earth could your little spitfire be 17?

You and I also attended a Springsteen concert today and had dear Ross' guidance on our culinary choices. Well, no choice really. In Philly that meant a cheese steak.

Deb Matthews

Actually, per Ross, 2 cheese steaks because he wanted to compare Geno's w/ Pat's. At least that's what he made me do when the Solo & Small Firm meetup in Philly happened.

David Kaufman

Thank you for sharing that, Andy.

I've only been on SoloSez for 10 years,* so I wasn't aware of the backstory.

*And, before someone else says it, I'm sure it feels like much longer to those of you who put up with my weird comments.

Brian H. Cole, California

Toilet paper hanging and Word vs Word Perfect are still controversies.

Naomi C. Fujimoto

Brian: No, because they've had to put up with me for around 12 years (9 of them in CA).

Naomi: Neither Word nor WordPerfect can hold a candle to WordStar.

Greg Zbylut

I remind that our/my ABA dues support Solosez and the other related links.

Please join the ABA. I have been a member since 1971.

Solosez is just one of many contributions made by the American Bar Association, which organization needs dues in order to provide services.

I add, your state bar and local bar([s]) do the same. Getting a bit far afield here. If your local bar(s) have regular meetings/luncheons/dinners with CLE (for which we receive continuing education credit in Texas, as we have at two bars in my area, work up a presentation and volunteer to present it, and then keep it tuned. Nowadays, 'they' often no longer have CLE papers to hand out; rather, 'they' have thumb drives. If you present, have real paper papers and leave white space in a margin for the lawyers to make notes. Try to go with two-sided pages; think about using colored paper. Of course, the cover page will identify you, your address, contact information, etc. You may want to tho' in thumb drives bearing your firm information.

I have met several Sezzers in person. To list three, I met Jennifer Rose, aka COTE, for the first time at an ABA annual meeting in Chicago some years ago.

Brian Cole. Met him for breakfast a few years ago near LAX. Now that I think about it, I think he gave me a lift from my LA hotel to breakfast and then to the airport. Thanks, Brian! By the way Brian Cole is your 'go to' franchise law attorney.

Dayum! I almost left out Meg Tebo. Have met her at both Austin and Chicago.

Mention of giving a lift brings some sadness. Shortly before his untimely passing, I gave the legendary Ross Kodner a lift in Austin. Was great to chauffeur a celebrity.

Rob Robertson, Texas

I remember reading a similar message from James on the 17th anniversary of COTE and was impressed by how amazing that was. Cannot believe I have been on my own since then, but I have Solosez to thank for my continued survival (and COTE for maybe our sanity?).

Here's to another 22 or more! Cheers.

Murtaza Sutarwalla, Texas

I remember many of those although I believe I have been on the list less than 15 years ... how do you tell? And... in case anyone has forgotten - it's over and WordPerfect will always be the far superior product even if it doesn't have a higher market share. :)

I miss Ross almost every single day. The legal and "tech" worlds are completely out of control. So bad these days, I don't even utter that word. I help law firms select the right people, processes and products needed to get the work done. I call them the 3 P's of office management. ;)

Thank you to all who make this list the true digital water cooler of legal - despite the craziness that goes on in the real world. You cannot duplicate Solosez on any other medium. We can have lists and groups and such - but they are not the same, never will be the same and cannot replace this list - in terms of function and feeling. We like it as it is, not because we are luddites who don't change; because we already know nothing about it needs changing.

... and can't believe you didn't have MOTH on the list!

Andrea Cannavina, nope notta

Been here since 2004. Never thought I'd still be posting here, but here I am thanks to all the wonderful folks on here. Probably will keep posting until I can no longer type.

Gene Lee, California

I tripped into SoloSez in late '98

Tremendous resource.

I fanatically sequence my subject lines as a result of SS.

[AREA] MY CLIENT and your client - Topic :: Specific Items

1. It lets the reader know what's up/in store 2. It helps you separate conversations 3. It enable you to search content 4. It shows that you CARE!

Givers gain.

Thx Creature of the Ether!

Michael J. Sweeney, Connecticut

I found SoloSex (☺) in 2008, when I realized that LPM class was not targeted to solos and small firms, and that I would be on my own when I went, well, on my own. So my Sezzer archives pre-date my law school graduation, as do my memberships in the ABA, the NCBA, and the NCAJ.

As a second-career lawyer, I had already figured out that I was pretty much too old to get any attention even from small firms until or unless I proved my mettle. (And by that time, I was more interested in building a small firm than joining one.) In fact, a friend and colleague who had been practicing law in a pretty big Silicon Valley firm in SF told me before I applied that I should not realistically expect to get any attention from firms due to my age (I started the MBA at 40, 1L at 41), and should plan my curriculum accordingly. If a firm /did/ give me any attention, he said, I should not expect to be given any serious consideration as a partner, as they would likely view me as not sufficiently "plastic" to be molded in the firm's image, and I should be prepared to be regurgitated after my initial stint as a wage slave.

I think I cajoled one into giving me an interview, but I knew from the outset it was mostly a sympathy call, because I applied for an interview despite being outside of their stated GPA range, explaining that I had spent my first two years caring for a terminally ill partner, and suggested they compare my performance (despite the circumstances) during those two years, and compare them to the first year of my MBA and my 3L year. I was awarded an MBA "with distinction" - I was in the top six in the class - so that may have counted for something.

And, in reality, based on that advice, and based on what led me to a dual-degree program in the first place, I mostly expected to find a firm that would give me a couple years' experience, and move on to consulting, leveraging my law degree and practice experience to bolster a business consulting gig. Ultimately, I discovered that enjoyed the law more than the business side, though I find the MBA very helpful at times. Solosez was a big factor in building my confidence, and keeping me from abandoning law practice early on (and several times since). And because folks here were always so willing to offer guidance, advice, legal know-how, forms, cites, and

encouragement, I have made it my practice for over a decade now to try to pay it forward not only here on the list, but to new lawyers, at least to the extent I had more of a clue than they did!

From memory, I have had referrals and/or local counsel work from Sezzers in Texas, California, Oregon, Nevada, New Jersey, Florida, Georgia, South Carolina, DC, Maryland, Ohio, Virginia, West Virginia, Pennsylvania, and Nebraska, and possibly others.

I have been able to provide Referrals to and for Sezzers into California, Texas, Colorado, Montana, Nevada, Georgia, Illinois, Michigan, Missouri, Ohio, New York, South Carolina, Florida, DC, Maryland, France, England, Canada, and Japan.

I hope the list is around for a good many more years; it's a wonderful benefit and a joy to many.

Richard J. Rutledge, Jr., North Carolina

Soon after I joined, I sent a post with [SOLOSEX] rather than [SOLOSEZ] in the heading. I was mortified and sure I was going to be ejected from the list. I sent another post immediately, apologizing. Duke kindly forgave me and assured me that that's why we have an annual meeting!

So many good times!

Marilou

Duke that prude! Just kidding

Eugene Lee

I found this group in 2009 when I first decided I needed to go on my own.

I was so incredibly grateful for the feeling of having a safety net that this listserve gave me back then. My solo practice was absorbed into another firm after some issues arose with my family (divorce) and I was badly hurt in a car accident. Circumstances ended my dream of having my own firm back then, but I always remembered this group fondly.

When life took another turn recently and I was ready to leave bigger firm practice and try again, I signed up here before I even had my own business phone line!

I'm older, wiser, stronger and have a new(old) last name, but I'm so happy to see the group still going strong.

Deena L. Buchanan, New Mexico

Welcome back!

Naomi C. Fujimoto

I think I've been on the list since 1998 or thereabouts (I'm too lazy to check at the moment). And I don't read or post nearly as much as I used to, but I do try to help people out now and then. . . . The list has been invaluable over the years.

And like Ron Jones, I miss those who have passed on.

Veronica Schnidrig, Oregon

It's been an amazing 22 years, no? Thank you one and all for those resoundingly great vibes.

Solosez began as a project of the American Bar Association Standing Committee on Solo & Small Firm Practitioners in 1996. In 2004 or so, sponsorship of the list was transferred to the ABA General Practice, Solo & Small Firm Division.

For the first few months of its life, subscribers stood around like kids at a junior high school dance, afraid to be the first ones on the dance floor. We weren't sure what we wanted to talk about, but Bruce Dorner and Ross Kodner broke the ice with the Word - WordPerfect jihad. Someone thoughtfully composed a hypothetical, and the unanimous response was "We've passed the bar, and we're not going to take any more law school final exams." A hesitant few would send their posts to Deb Owen, who was the staff director of Solosez' original sponsor, the ABA Standing Committee on Solo and Small Firm Lawyers, and to me, asking that we bless their submissions.

We've had lawyers join and promptly complain about the noise level, only to find themselves become among the list's most active posters. Some of our number have left private practice for other practice settings, and some have come to Solosez from those settings. Solosez lawyers practice in very rural communities as well as in New York City. This group represents the broadest range of specialties imaginable.

During its 22 years, Solosez has developed its own legends, history, nicknames for frequent participants, and, like family and friends, its own language. Breaking the usual "15% of a list's subscribers make 80% of the noise" axiom, participation among subscribers is very high. They consider themselves not simply mailing list subscribers – but "The Firm." They even speak of withdrawal if the list server's down, wondering if they've been suspended from the list.

Beyond combating professional isolation, Solosez is a sounding board for lawyers who don't have the resources of a large firm:

1. It's a source for quick answers on substantive legal issues, technology, law office management, and even personal issues.
2. One feature we offer is the ability to send anonymous posts. Actually, this just sort of happened about 20 years ago when a list member had discovered that his secretary embezzled from his trust account. The lawyer was notifying the bar authorities, but at 5 a.m., he wanted to know what he should do next. So, he asked me to post the question anonymously, because he didn't want his identity revealed. Since then, this feature has been used by list subscribers about

once every ten days for personal issues as well as substantive legal questions when the subscriber doesn't want his or her identity revealed.

3. It's a referral source. List members are making connections and networking for new business.
4. There's a strong support network here. The list has been there for new lawyers going through their first trials, for list members struggling with nasty opposing counsel, hiring and firing staff, and even list members wanting to transition to and from other practice settings.
5. Solosez subscribers have a friend in every city in America and even abroad. It's not unusual to see someone posting "I'm going to Seattle, and would anyone like to have lunch?" Someone will respond, and it's sort of like Rotary for solo and small firm lawyers.
6. Lawyers in small towns, and sometimes even LA's a small town, there's no one for solo and small firm practitioners to bounce ideas off of, to approach with problems, or even to get that second opinion. Solosez extends the range throughout the planet for these folks.
7. It's an opportunity for lawyers inexperienced in a particular area to rub elbows with the masters. We have some lawyers who can barely draft a divorce petition, and they're able to get a quick answer from nationally recognized matrimonial lawyers.

I'm humbled by the praise heap upon COTE, but all of the credit belongs to the Solosez community.

And like Rob Robertson, please show your support and help the Solosez survive by joining the ABA.

jennifer j. rose, Mexico

I think I've been on Solosez for over 20 years. Perhaps Jennifer knows.

I joined Solosez when I met Frank Kautz. Frank told me he was on 17 listserves. At the time, I didn't know what a listserve was!

As a result of Solosez:

1. I've met a number of you in person. Ross and I shared a number of food experiences (including me sticking my spoon in his creme brulee).
2. The Massachusetts group has been meeting for monthly dinners for around 20 years. We refer work to each other all the time, but more importantly, we always provide an ear for bouncing a question or how to deal with a sticky situation.
3. I wrote numerous articles for the solo/small firm column or magazine or newsletter, or whatever it was.
4. I went to a number of Techshows.

5. I wrote a chapter for a book.
 6. I presented at the ABA annual meeting (my PowerPoint was a disaster-not to be remembered).
 7. I helped host Boston Techshow.
 8. I was chair of the LPM division of the Mass Bar Association.
 9. I've received referrals and referred some awesome matters.
 10. I've read some great books.
 11. I rushed to join Facebook and now have a number of people I barely know seeing pictures of my family.
 12. I met Andrea Cannavina and think she's awesome.
 13. I am usually up on the latest/greatest technology for solos.
- There's probably more, but it's more than enough!

Andrea Goldman, Massachusetts

In this thread "Ross" and "Ross Kodner" have been mentioned.

He was a force unto himself and a great contributor to this list.

Unfortunately, he unexpectedly passed away in the last couple of years or so.

I have mentioned this before somewhere. Some years ago he had to be in Austin for a technology presentation at a conference. I offered to pick him up and take him back to the airport. That was enjoyable. I think I even saved up some questions for him.

I have met several people from this list in person at Los Angeles and Chicago and Memphis and New Orleans and Fort Worth. A couple of 'regulars' practice in my geographical area.

Solosez is a valuable resource, subsidized by our American Bar Association dues.

And someone remind me/us. There are a couple of other Solosez-related pages where we can post attachments, etc.?

What are they?

Rob Robertson, Texas
