

BRIEFLYLEGALpdx

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January 5, 2012

You never forget your first time ...

*Ok, stop snickering. We're not talking X-rated content here. We're just asking local attorneys to share memories of their first solo case, major project or courtroom trial: the nerves and jitters, the planning and preparing, the right moves they made and even the wrong ones. This week, **Dave Riewald**, a shareholder with **Bullard Smith Jernstedt Wilson**, tells all.*

"I learned a very valuable lesson the first time I went to court back in the early 1980s. I had been out of law school about a year and was practicing with a firm in Lansing, Mich.

"One morning about 10 a.m., a senior partner set a six-inch-thick file on my desk and said, 'I need you to cover a court hearing for me at 1 p.m. today.' Then he walked out of my office.

"I had never seen the file before and knew nothing about the case. Panic set in. I started to look through the file to see what the hearing was about. There was more bad news: The hearing was in Flint, an hour away. That left me two hours to pore through the file and get ready for the hearing.

"Then I looked at how I was dressed; I was wearing a sport coat and tie. If I was going to court, I felt I had to wear my three-piece suit. The problem was that it would take me an hour to drive to my apartment on the other side of town and change into my suit. I had to decide whether to spend my time preparing for the hearing or getting my suit. I chose the suit.

"I walked into the courtroom just in time and scared to death. When the judge entered the courtroom, he used his right hand to gingerly feel his way along the back wall behind the bench. When his left hand eventually found the back of his chair, he slowly sat down. The judge was blind. I could have been wearing shorts and a t-shirt and he never would have known it.

"All these years later I don't remember what the hearing was about (it had to be something minor for a partner to send a rookie like me) or what I said (I'm equally sure it couldn't have been that insightful). What I do remember is the lesson I learned that day: Focus your energies on the things that are really important, and don't get caught up in the unimportant stuff."

