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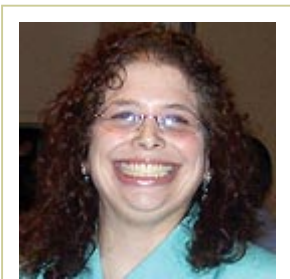
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## Cheer up

**Tracey I. Batt / Special to NLJ.com  
November 24, 2008**



New Jersey Volunteer  
Lawyers for the Arts'  
Tracey I. Batt

When I was a teenager in the halcyon days of the early 1980s, people got bored with the old-style wooden roller coaster at the big mid-state amusement park. This being before the days of the fancy-dancy roller coasters with multiple loops and barrel rolls, hanging cars and body harnesses, park management came to a simpler and more elegant solution for their flagging coaster ridership. They turned the cars around and ran the ride backwards. Up, down, up, down, rattle rattle, wheeeee. But without the ability to see the next drop before the world fell away behind you.

That is exactly the way the Dow Jones Industrial Average makes me feel these days. I am throwing my hands in the air, and I have no idea whether what is coming next is a rise, a slight dip, or a heart-stopping descent into the abyss. I cannot even tell when I should bring down my hands and hang onto the lap bar for dear life. After seven years of socking away my hard-earned New York big firm money in a 401(k) plan, I have spent the last five years in the not-for-profit world confident that my previously

amassed nest eqq was tucked away somewhere safe and warm and would not be poached before I reach retirement age. Wheeeee. I hope I don't throw up.

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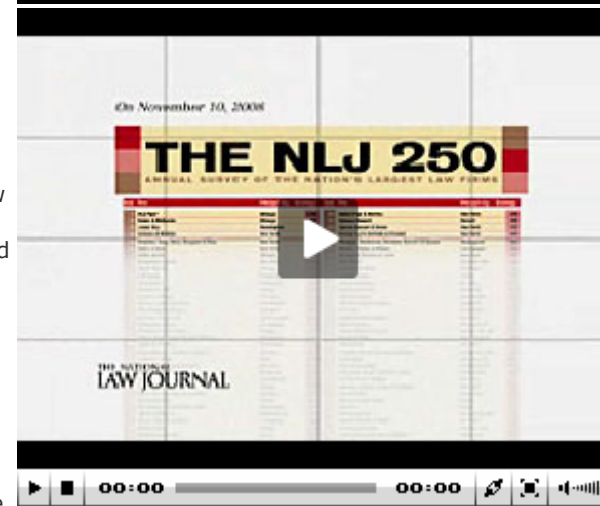
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For my parents, the economic downturn has been more like a giant game of "Chutes and Ladders." My father turns 70 next month, and he will be retiring from the practice of law. After 45 years with the same small, small-town firm, investing carefully for the magical day at the end of 2008, he and my mother had the end of the game in sight. Just one more roll of the dice! Whoops, bad luck, a big slide backwards. Wheeeee. Unlike me, they do not have the luxury of sitting tight and watching the funds build again over the next couple of decades.

It seems that everywhere I look these days, there is bad news. One of my closest friends from my old firm left shortly after I did and became special counsel at another big New York City firm. That firm recently collapsed, leaving hundreds of attorneys, including my friend, and other employees out of work with almost no notice. One of my old friends from college is going through a distressing and awkward separation from her husband. A close relative of mine is so ill that she may well not be alive when this piece runs later this month, and my entire family struggles to get through each day.

The amazing thing about my recent communications with all of these people, my law firm friend, my college friend, my parents, and my other family members, is that they have been, in large part, wonderfully upbeat. My law firm buddy and I have been exchanging hilarious emails, many of which poke fun at the generally horrible state of things. My college friend and I talked on the phone for hours one recent evening, frequently laughing so hard that I saw stars. And when my family gathers, despite all the terrible pain and the stress, we reminisce, and we tell in-jokes that no one else would ever understand, and we laugh. We laugh unselfconsciously and completely, until beverages of varying carbonation and alcohol content levels, depending on age and/or designated driver status, come out our respective noses. Then we laugh some more. Oh, and we cheer like maniacs for the Phillies.

Yes, the economy stinks. Yes, all sorts of things will be unpredictable in the next few months as the nation transitions to a new administration. Yes, law firms are merging and folding and laying off and cutting back and delaying start dates and hiring fewer people and eliminating year-end bonuses. Yes, the sudden drop in IOLTA proceeds is causing pro bono legal services providers nationwide to cut services and staff, including attorneys. Yes, you have a right to worry about whether you will have the ability to make your mortgage and law school loan payments. But if you dwell on these issues to the exclusion of all else, you will surely lose your mind.



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Watch a funny movie. Surf the Internet for pictures of pets with silly captions. Share a humorous email with someone you know who also needs a little giggle therapy. Do whatever it takes to spread cheer, and you will find that it will spread right back to you, because laughter is contagious.

Laughter is also, as they say, the best medicine. Shortly after my relative first got sick, we were sitting around the table at a family dinner, and someone told a story that made her laugh heartily. I could see that it hurt her to laugh so hard. I could also see that she preferred to endure the pain to experience the incredible healing powers of laughing with wild abandon. I will always remember that laugh, and I will miss it.

*Tracey I. Batt, Esq., is the Executive Director of New Jersey Volunteer Lawyers for the Arts, Inc. Before joining NJVLA, she was the Associate Director and Legal Services Manager of Philadelphia Volunteer Lawyers for the Arts and an associate at Weil, Gotshal & Manges LLP in New York, where she practiced copyright and music licensing law for seven years.*

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