

# From Humble Beginnings – Doug Sears’ Country Road to the ADC Presidency

By Eric M. Bonzell, Matheny, Sears, Linkert & Long



Doug and Liz Sears.

**Y**ou can take the boy out of the country, but you can't take the country out of the boy.

For those that know 2005 ADC president Doug Sears on a personal level, the influence of growing up in a rural community is readily apparent. Likewise, as evidenced by former ADC President Ric Blumhardt's introduction of Doug at last year's annual ADC meeting, Sears has suffered no small amount of grief over his countrified upbringing.

Sears claims Oakland as his birthplace and San Leandro as his residence for the first three years of his life. This less-than-memorable Big City experience was but a brief stop on the way to Doug's true childhood home of Oroville. The son of an avid hunter and fisherman from Idaho, rural and quaint, pre-Oroville Dam Butte County was a natural place for the Sears family to put down roots. Doug attended elementary school and high school in Oroville and, as a testament to his childhood, to this day still maintains friendships with several acquaintances from his kindergarten days.

One such life-long friendship is likely the spark that kindled Sears' interest in the law. Doug's longest friendship was established in kindergarten, with Steve Leonard. Steve's father, Raymond, was a founding partner of the Oroville law firm of Leonard & Lyde. Sears long knew that he did not wish to follow in his father's footsteps as a glazier, and he began to notice the reputation and respect enjoyed by Mr. Leonard's law practice in their small rural community.

Doug's ticket back to the Bay Area and eventually to law school arrived via what he humbly describes as an ill-fated basketball career. Borrowing a scene from "Hoosiers", Sears was a standout hoopster at Oroville Union High School. During his senior year in high school, Doug was only one of a handful of basketball players honored with an "All League" distinction. Shying away from self-glorification, Sears attributes his success to the efforts of what he describes as an outstanding varsity basketball team. He was subsequently recruited to attend and play basketball at the collegiate powerhouse of its day, the University of San Francisco.

Among those recruited with Doug were other noteworthy high school players, including three high school All-Americans: Joe Ellis, Russ Gumina and Erwin Mueller. Taking a realistic look at his basketball prospects against such stiff competition, the country boy from Oroville turned his attention to academics as he completed his undergraduate studies at U.S.F. In addition to his studies, Sears cherishes the friendships nurtured while attending college, including those future ADC presidents John Drath, Dan Quinn and Ray Coates and California Supreme Court Justice Ming Chin.

Upon graduation from U.S.F., Doug was accepted to both law school and the M.B.A. program at U.C.L.A. Due in large part to his childhood feelings for Raymond Leonard, Sears decided to forego U.C.L.A. (and Lew Alcindor), in order to attend law school. Had he not chosen law school, he believes that he would have followed the M.B.A. program to its logical conclusion, and would likely be putting his charming personality to work in the fields of marketing or public relations.

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Although Doug started law school at U.S.F. after one year and at the urging of fellow U.S.F. graduate Mike Cardoza, he joined Mike at McGeorge School of Law in sunny Sacramento. After passing the Bar exam in 1970, he accepted a position with the Sacramento County District Attorney's Office in February 1971 and stayed in that office until March 1975. After prosecuting cases in the D.A.'s office eleven months, Doug became the youngest deputy D.A. ever to try a first degree murder case - and won. He continued to shine throughout his prosecutorial career; he was the youngest deputy ever selected to be a member of and eventually became supervisor of the Major Crimes Unit. In this capacity, he tried and won twelve first-degree murder cases. Doug also claims the distinction of trying a jury trial, from voir dire to verdict, in the grand total of two hours and eight minutes.

In March 1975, Doug shifted gears and left his supervisory position with the D.A.'s Office and became an associate with McDonald & Donahue, in Sacramento. He remained there until August of 1978 when he joined Henry "Hank" Matheny and became a partner with Matheny, Poidmore & Sears. Partner Rick Linkert joined the firm three months later. Five years thereafter, the firm added Ernie Long, giving Matheny, Sears, Linkert and Long the partnership nucleus which remains in place today. When asked about his partners, Doug profoundly exclaims that he and his partners have now been together over twenty years, "... longer than my first marriage!"

It was through his entry into the Sacramento civil defense bar that Doug originally joined the ADC, in 1976. At the time, all of the attorneys in the McDonald & Donahue firm belonged to ADC and historically, all six to eight attorneys, including Mr. McDonald, would attend the Annual ADC Meeting. After leaving the McDonald firm and coming to work with Hank Matheny, Doug continued his membership in ADC. In 1998, Doug was approached by the late Bruno Marraccini and asked to become a member of the Board of Directors. In 2002, Sears became an ADC officer.

Sears' is earnest in his support of ADC, which he believes to be one of the premier civil defense organizations in the United States, which remains committed to promotion of the interests and education of its members. He believes its importance has grown over the years as the practice of civil "defense" law has broadened and diversified into non-traditional areas of defense and business practice. It is a testament to ADC that other state civil defense organizations look to the ADC as an innovative leader at the forefront of ongoing changes in defense practices. Through the efforts of its legislative advocate, Mike Belote, with whom Doug frequently communicates, the ADC has a respected presence in Sacramento and is actively involved in the legislative process to protect its members' interests.



Doug with daughter, Ashley, and son, Aaron.

While in law school at McGeorge, Doug married Connie Delehant, a student at Lone Mountain College. Doug and Connie had two children, Aaron Douglas (32), and Ashley Irene (29). Aaron graduated from the University of California at Berkeley and is now a Director of Business Development at Yahoo! in Sunnyvale. Daughter Ashley is a graduate of the University of Colorado at Boulder and is now the general manager of a janitorial supply company (the self-proclaimed "Queen of sanitation & janitorial supplies") in Steamboat Springs, Colorado. Both Aaron and Ashley have thus far provided their proud dad with three grandchildren; Ashley will be adding to Doug's collection with his fourth grandchild due this coming April.

In February 1992, at the superior court swearing-in ceremony of his longtime friend and colleague from the D.A.'s office, Richard Gilmour, Doug met Elizabeth Netemeyer, a southern belle and graduate of the Universities of Alabama and Virginia. As many of you know, Doug and Liz (aka "Magnolia") were recently wed in a ceremony over which Judge Gilmour presided. Not giving the other passion in his life short shrift, Doug proceeded to drive from the Courthouse in Sacramento to Silverado Country Club to play in the ADC Annual Golf Tournament!

As one would surmise, when time allows, Doug is an avid golfer. He is a regular participant in the almost-annual "Viking Open" golf tournament, which consists of eight friends (one from Stockholm, Sweden – thus the name of the event) who meet at different golfing venues around the world for the four-day event. Doug and his cohorts have "competed" at such golfing meccas as Hilton Head Island, South Carolina; Scottsdale, Arizona; and Scotland. Doug's personal highlight of the Scotland trip was shooting an 81 on the "Ailsa" course at Turnberry, thus securing Viking Open victory and his place on the tournament's perpetual trophy. He is looking forward to this year's event, which is slated to take place in Sweden ... trial schedule permitting.

Doug's other interests include art and wine. He proudly chairs the "Art & Beverage" Committee in his firm. Visitors to his office often notice that he has no higher education diplomas hanging in his office. He is however, proud to display many works of art which he has acquired over the years.

Finally, and not-coincidental to his formative years, Doug's other recreational time is devoted to working on a ten acre "ranch" and pond in Chicago Park, in the Sierra Foothills that he and Liz share, where there always seems to be something in need of repair, mending or installing. Truly, it seems you just can't take the country out of the boy ....