

**BOLHOUSE, BAAR & LEFERE, P.C.**  
**ATTORNEYS AT LAW**

**Hollywood vs Reality**

Richard L. Bolhouse

January 2012

I remember reading the book *The Firm* by John Grisham, an accomplished attorney himself, when it was first published many years ago. It was a great read, was subsequently made into a movie for the big screen, and soon we'll be seeing a TV series based on it.

Hollywood has been infatuated with *the law* for decades. From Perry Mason in the 60s, to Leland McKenzie (*LA Law*) and Bobby Donnell (*The Practice*) in the 80s and 90s respectively, to the still-airing Jack McCoy (*Law and Order*), TV loves lawyers.

There have also been many great movies with law themes. Remember the alcoholic Frank Galvin (Paul Newman) in the courtroom drama *The Verdict*? *My Cousin Vinny* with Joe Pesci and Marisa Tomei was a highly entertaining comedy. And who could forget sleazy attorney Ned Racine (William Hurt) and steamy seductress Matty Walker (Kathleen Turner) in *Body Heat*. While interesting and perhaps even thrilling, none of these portrayals are anywhere close to reality.

Hollywood usually shows the lawyer working on one case throughout the entire story. Most attorneys in our office are working on over a hundred cases at any given time! In Hollywood, the entire trial of a highly complex case is run in a matter of minutes at the end of the show and closing arguments take a few seconds. In reality, trials often take weeks, sometimes months, and closing arguments can last for days. And truthfully...they can be boring. Discussions that take place in Hollywood's courtrooms and judges' chambers are nothing like the discussions that take place in West Michigan's courthouses.

Finally, the practice of law is not nearly as fun and exciting as Hollywood would lead you to believe. (I'm thinking *Night Court* here, with Harry Anderson and John Larroquette.) Most lawyers work long hours under stressful conditions in an effort to get their clients the best possible outcomes to the situations and problems they bring present.

We do our best to dispel Hollywood's mythical version of the practice of law. Our lawyers and staff spend time speaking at schools and other settings on what it's really like to be an attorney. We often get phone calls from young people who are interested in a legal career but would first like to spend some time talking with real lawyers at a real firm to see what practicing law is truly like before making a huge commitment. We're happy to give them that time.

In the end, being an attorney is a highly rewarding career, but very different from what is portrayed on TV and in the movies, as any visit to a real law firm or a real courtroom will show.