

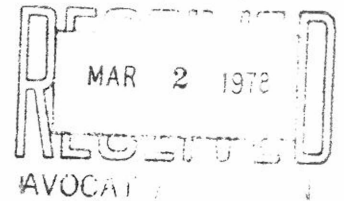


United States Department of Justice

OFFICE FOR IMPROVEMENTS IN THE
ADMINISTRATION OF JUSTICE
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20530

January 31, 1978

RONALD P. SOKOL
LAW OFFICES



Mr. Ronald P. Sokol
Avocat Americain
Conseil Juridique
13540 Puyricard
Aix-en-Provence FRANCE

Dear Ron:

I am happy to move your admission to the Supreme Court and I have signed and mailed the papers today.

This is in great haste as I am leaving for the airport to go to Boston for another eye examination. I will report to you later as to the exact status of matters.

Sincerely,

Daniel J. Meador
Assistant Attorney General

Loss of Sight Doesn't Stop Assistant Attorney General

BY RONALD J. OSTROW
Times Staff Writer

WASHINGTON—The opportunity to conceive and try to carry out sweeping improvements in the nation's system of justice seemed "irresistible" to the University of Virginia law professor.

"I could not have designed a position that suited me any better anywhere in government," recalled Daniel J. Meador, assistant attorney general for improvements in the administration of justice.

But four months after he obtained a two-year leave from the university and accepted nomination by President Carter to the new Justice Department post, Meador made the first of several offers to resign.

At age 50, Meador had lost his sight, probably permanently, as the result of a detached retina.

"I always assumed from the beginning that if I didn't recover any sight, I ought to give up the job," Meador said in an interview.

But he has changed his mind, bolstered by unflagging support from

Atty. Gen. Griffin B. Bell and aided by subordinates who now record on tape or read directly to him matters they used to put in writing. He also has overhauled his writing and speaking techniques.

Next Thursday, Meador will hold his first press briefing since taking office to outline the details of what he considers the most ambitious program of civil and criminal justice reform the Justice Department has ever attempted. The proposed revisions vary from developing alternatives to time-consuming class-action lawsuits to new proposals for handgun control.

Meador speaks openly about his struggle to deal with the trauma of losing his sight.

He still uses the vocabulary of the sighted—for example, telling a visitor he looks forward to "seeing" him again and speaking of things being "emblazoned in neon lights."

But he is realistic about the chance to see again.

Having undergone four unsuccessful operations last May and June for a retinal detachment in his right eye—he lost the sight of his left eye two

years earlier—Meador faces one more operation.

That operation has a success rate of only 5%. "If it is not successful, it is the end of the line," Meador said.

Even if he beats the odds, doctors have told him he cannot regain reading vision. He is hoping for "a minimum getting-around vision."

"If I could get just enough vision to go around myself—walk the halls and sidewalks and go here and there without having to have the assistance of somebody—that would be an enormous asset," Meador said. "There is a chance, but I think it's slim."

Despite the detachment and good humor Meador is able to muster now he acknowledges some bleak hours and days during his two-month hospital recovery period.

For a while he thought of resigning his government post and also of not returning immediately to the university. He went so far as to submit an undated letter of resignation, which the attorney general refused to accept.

Meador's wife, Janet, and others strongly urged him not to go without

a job, but Mrs. Meador took no position on whether he should go back to the university or keep his new post.

He finally made what he now calls "a tentative" decision to resume his Justice Department work for two reasons.

"It was a new kind of exciting enterprise that might absorb me more, that might serve to keep my mind off my own problems," Meador said.

Secondly, he said he realized he would have "more help and support" at the Justice Department than he would at the university.

One form of assistance he got was a "reader," who also performs "a seeing-eye dog function if I have to go to Capitol Hill and see a senator," Meador said.

The aide is Susan Porter, who, before joining the department, had served as appointments secretary for former first ladies Pat Nixon and Betty Ford.

Besides reading to Meador and helping him get around, Miss Porter assists him on what once was a favor-

ite task of his—editing first drafts of speeches and testimony into finely honed, finished products.

"This is rather slow and tedious (when done) through somebody else," Meador said. "But I'm developing a facility for it."

Meador has found that concentration and memory are crucial to coping with loss of sight.

"You've got to have them to survive," he said. "You don't have any crutches—no notes to glance at. You can't just flip back a few pages and refresh your memory. You've got to get it as you hear it and retain it."

Meador is taking Braille instructions, but has learned that "it takes a long time to develop a quick facility."

Since August, he has made several speeches and testified twice before congressional committees. In preparing for these appearances, Meador has his material tape-recorded. He listens to it two or three times, making a mental outline of what he hears.

There are setbacks sometimes. One occurred on his flight to Boston in September when the airport's electronic security mechanism apparently erased a tape of dictated correspondence he was carrying.

Seeing his frustration, Miss Porter reminded him: "It could have been a whole briefcase filled with tapes."

"A lot of times, I don't feel I'm coping very well at all," Meador said. "There are a lot of people who say that they think I am. It's a terribly awkward situation, and there are a number of times I don't feel comfortable in circumstances of one kind or another."

"But I'm just going on, you know, from day to day, which is all I can do," he said.

The way many of his Justice Department colleagues see it, that is a great deal.

