WSJ.com THE WALL STREET JOURNAL. ONLINE

FORMAT FOR PRINTING sponsored by TOSHIBA Don't copy. Lead.

June 6, 2007

BEST OF THE LAW BLOG

A Novel Opens the Curtains Around Federal Clerkships

By PETER LATTMAN
June 6, 2007; Page B2

DOW JONES REPRINTS

This copy is for your personal, non-commercial use only. To order presentation-ready copies for distribution to your colleagues, clients or customers, use the Order Reprints tool at the bottom of any article or visit: www.djreprints.com.

• See a sample reprint in PDF format.
• Order a reprint of this article now.

For law-school graduates, a clerkship with a federal judge is a coveted brass ring. But along with landing one of these prized positions comes an unwritten rule: What goes on in chambers, stays in chambers.

"Chambermaid," a just-published novel, pushes those bounds. It's the story of a young lawyer named Sheila Raj who lands a prestigious federal-appeals court clerkship in Philadelphia. Sheila's judge is described as a "power-hungry sociopath." Saira Rao, the book's author, spent a year clerking for Dolores Sloviter, a federal appeals-court judge in Philadelphia.

Hillery Stone
Saira Rao, clerk-turned-author

"While informed by personal observations, this is a novel," says Ms. Rao. "I clerked in the Third Circuit and the novel is based in the Third Circuit. People can draw their own conclusions." Ms. Rao says she wrote the book to shine a light on the federal judiciary. "If you go to law schools' clerkship offices and look in the binders there is glowing review after glowing review of every federal judge in the country," she said. "You'd get the impression that every judge is a mix of Mother Theresa and Einstein."

Ms. Rao declined to comment on her own clerkship but said "it's fair to say that many law clerks have totally strange experiences." She added: "This is to be expected if you're in very close quarters with just a couple of people -- all type triple-A personalities and one judge who's tenured for life."

Through an assistant, Judge Sloviter says she hasn't read the book and thus can't comment.

Levity for Lerach

A little levity emerged, twice, recently in a case that involved William Lerach, as the high-profile plaintiffs lawyer himself has made headlines of a more-serious nature.

Last week, rumors swirled that Mr. Lerach planned to retire. When Mr. Lerach appeared on Thursday before

a federal judge in Minneapolis for a lawsuit against **UnitedHealth Group** Inc. alleging improper stock-options backdating, Judge James Rosenbaum asked Mr. Lerach point-blank about the rumors. The lawyer cryptically responded that, like the reports of Mark Twain's demise, the reports of his retirement were greatly exaggerated.

So did that make them true? Sort of. Friday afternoon, Mr. Lerach's firm announced that he is "considering retirement" and noted that a continuing Justice Department investigation into the activities of his former firm, Milberg Weiss & Bershad LLP, "should not become a distraction to our firm and its ongoing work." Mr. Lerach hasn't been charged.

On Monday, Judge Rosenbaum ruled in favor of Mr. Lerach's client in the backdating case, denying UnitedHealth's motion to dismiss the case. Judge Rosenbaum turned to the movies for an analogy. The essence of the plaintiffs' theory -- that UnitedHealth officials had rigged the game by backdating stock options -- "lies at the core of the plot in one of Hollywood's most entertaining and honored films," wrote the judge, who emphasized that while he was allowing the lawsuit to proceed, he had no opinion on the merits of the plaintiffs' case. "In 'The Sting,' the bad guy is ultimately brought down by utterly charming con men, played by Paul Newman and Robert Redford," wrote Judge Rosenbaum. "They gain their revenge through a scheme involving 'past-posting,' or betting on horse races after the results are known." He hastened to add: "parenthetically, the Court commends 'The Sting' to all parties."

UnitedHealth said the shareholder plaintiffs suffered no losses because of the alleged backdating.

Write to Peter Lattman at peter.lattman@wsj.com[1].

Read more about law, business and the business of law at WSJ.com's Law Blog, updated throughout each business day at WSJ.com/Lawblog[2].

URL for this article:
http://online.wsj.com/article/SB118109877150926101.html

Hyperlinks in this Article:
(1) mailto:peter.lattman@wsj.com
(2) http://WSJ.com/Lawblog

Copyright 2007 Dow Jones & Company, Inc. All Rights Reserved

This copy is for your personal, non-commercial use only. Distribution and use of this material are governed by our **Subscriber Agreement** and by copyright law. For non-personal use or to order multiple copies, please contact Dow Jones Reprints at 1-800-843-0008 or visit **www.djreprints.com**.