



OCTLA President

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Journal of Consumer Attorneys Associations for Southern California
ADVOCATE

January 2022

Be generous

YOU'LL GET BACK A LOT MORE THAN YOU GIVE

In May of 2006, I hopped on my motorcycle to go to the monthly OCTLA meeting. I remember the topic was opening statements, and I had a big case coming up for trial. I was excited to see my new friends and get some insight on how to tell a good story on opening.

I had been riding motorcycles my entire life, but the old saw about motorcycle riders is that it's not *if*, but *when* someone is going to not see you and pull in front of you. As it turned out, on my way to the OCTLA monthly meeting, my time had come. A large truck turned left in front of me so fast that I literally had no time to even put on the brakes.

I remember hitting the side of the truck, and then blacking out. When I woke up, I was flying through the air. I hit the ground, rolled, and then tried to get up. I realized I was seriously injured. In hindsight, I should have been dead or paralyzed. I guess I was lucky that I had only completely shattered my left leg, had a severe concussion, and the usual bumps, bruises, cuts and scrapes. My bell had been rung, and I now know I had the classic TBI symptoms. (Opposing counsel will tell you that I must still have severe brain damage). Two surgeries and a year later, I was fully recovered. Hopefully, the silver lining going through that experience was that it made me much more sensitive and empathetic to my own personal-injury clients.

I joined the Orange County Trial Lawyers Association because, in my mind, I was a trial attorney, and I wanted to be a better trial attorney. This was the organization for trial attorneys. I tried my first case (it was a real estate case) and got my first victory as a third-year law student at Hastings. The trial was at Lake Tahoe and involved an easement. During my first year at Rutan and Tucker I got my first million-dollar jury verdict in a real

estate/guarantor case. After leaving the firm in 1995, I thought I would just find some new firm to join.

As it turned out, I spent the next 13 years literally working out of my house, while raising my four kids as a single dad. I tried my first case as a sole practitioner, working out of my kitchen, and obtained another million-dollar verdict in another real estate case. My practice was almost exclusively business and real estate litigation until one of my hockey buddies was seriously hurt in a skating accident. I took that case all the way to jury verdict in Los Angeles County and learned a lot about personal injury cases. We had motions for summary judgment based on the assumption of risk doctrine, Medicare and other liens, and the insurer ended up insolvent, so we got to deal with CIGA. I thought that case would be a "one off," but then another friend of mine was seriously injured in a freak fall at a movie studio. I started taking PI and other contingency cases and never looked back.

I remember getting a call from Doug Schroeder in 2012. I had finally leased a small one-man office in Cypress and hired a secretary. Doug told me he had heard about a jury verdict I obtained in Los Angeles, and he wanted to talk about it. Doug said I was being considered for a "Top Gun" award. After my secretary picked me up off the floor, we looked at each other and said, "Are we being pranked?" To this day I cannot believe that Doug handed me that award in 2012, and yes, I still think it must be some sort of grand prank you all have pulled on me. Nevertheless, it was a complete game changer for me. The impact that award, and this organization, have had on my career trajectory is incalculable. I have been trying to give back ever since.

Living on the Bulletin Board

Joining OCTLA was perhaps the best decision I have ever made as an attorney. The old Bulletin Board (now we call it the List Serv) was such a valuable resource. I was on the Bulletin Board all the time. I would meet people at our meetings and they would say, "Oh, you are that guy who is on the Bulletin Board all the time." I was *that* guy. Today, I truly appreciate those of you who contribute whenever you can on the List Serv. To me, it remains our most valuable resource, and levels the playing field with the big firms and insurance companies.

I love this organization and its members – I can't say that enough. I have received so much more than I have given to OCTLA. The resources are endless. Our members share their knowledge, time, insights, experts, pleadings, and more. We all cheer each other on when someone gets a great verdict or settlement.

To that end, if I have a "theme" for this year of my Presidency, it is generosity. I want to urge all of our members to be generous – with your time, with your resources, and yes, with your money. Please continue to contribute to the List Serv, volunteer on committees, speak at our MCLE events, and become a sponsor! Upgrade your membership. Get people to join. Look for any other way we can "give back" to our members. I truly appreciate the chance to lead this organization through 2022. Joining the Board, being voted onto the Executive Committee, and now serving as President, are all my attempts to give back to this organization. I look forward to a great year! Let's rock this.

