



CAALA President

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## Time to take a breath for a little tradition

FROM SPRINGFIELD, OHIO, I CAME TO STAY IN SUNNY CAL-I-FORN-I-A

The January President's Column is traditionally an autobiographical piece about the incoming president. But the past two years have been anything but traditional. Instead of a biographical piece, I laid out a bold agenda to guide us for the next year and beyond in all aspects of our association – Education, CAALA Vegas, Document Bank and Video Library, List Serves, Political Action, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, Civility, Adequate Court Funding, and Independence of the Judiciary.

As we were dealing with the Omicron surge in January and February, we focused on laying the groundwork for the development of a comprehensive strategic plan to guide CAALA. In March, we put all those great ideas together to form CAALA's Strategic Plan Task Force. That work is just beginning and will be used to guide CAALA for years to come. We must have a strategic plan to chart our course into the future. And to be prepared for, as we now know, anything.

CAALA was finally able to hold its Gala in March and I was officially installed as President – after almost four months on the job! The many hours and intensive planning are starting to pay off, but there is much left to do and we will not rest until our work is done. I will, however, take a breath in this moment to return to a little tradition and share my story with you.

I have lived in California for over 30 years, but I am originally from a small town, Springfield, Ohio. It might surprise you to know that I am not the only CAALA President from Springfield, Ohio. Past President and esteemed trial lawyer Gary Paul is also from Springfield. I always thought LA was the cradle of CAALA Presidents, but as it turns out, it's Springfield, Ohio!

My parents, Marv and Sandy, both first-generation Americans, will celebrate their 56th wedding anniversary this year and still live in the same house I spent my

first 18 years. I could not have asked for anything more from my parents. They instilled in my sisters, Amy and Carrie, and me the values of hard work, fairness and always treating others with respect. I have tried to honor them by instilling those same values in my four children, Jordan, Sean, Tyler and Dylan. My children have been the great joy of my life, especially coaching their sports teams and watching them grow from children to adults. I am especially grateful to my wife, Shauna, who moved to Michigan with my youngest so he could pursue his dream of playing ice hockey.

You probably couldn't tell from my last name, but I'm actually Jewish. While being a white, Jewish, male in his mid-50s may not be unique in Los Angeles, growing up in Springfield, Ohio I was the only Jew in my high school. Because of that, I was always viewed differently and learned to fight with my words and, at times, fists. My high school was also majority African American and heavily Hispanic, and I learned to speak Spanish just about fluently. All these experiences helped to shape my outlook on life. I knew from an early age I wanted to be a lawyer.

I went to the University of Miami, Florida for college, and earned my MBA at Nova Southeastern University. Before going to law school, I worked as a late-night deejay and a sommelier. I earned my law degree at Whittier Law School, where I was a law review editor, won the Moot Court Best Oral Advocate and graduated *magna cum laude*. I took a job with Morgan, Lewis & Bockius, one of the largest corporate firms in the world, practicing defense employment law. I then went to Ballard, Rosenberg, Golper & Savitt, a boutique employment- defense firm, and then to Littler Mendelson, the largest employment-defense firm in the world.

In 2004, at the same time I had a new baby and bought a new house, Brian Kesluk and I formed our current law firm

after getting to know each other coaching our sons on the soccer and baseball fields of the Valley. We hired Michael Jacob and Lauren Morrison right out of law school, and I am proud to share our firm name with them. Katie Roland is another outstanding long-time attorney at our firm, also hired right out of law school. For me, they are all family.

With this team, I have been lucky enough to try many cases, obtaining punitive damages in my last six trials. We have numerous published appellate decisions, often making law favorable to employees on issues of first impression. Most of all, we have made a difference in the lives of our clients.

Making the decision to become a plaintiff's employment attorney was the riskiest decision I have ever made. It has defined my career. Who else but plaintiff's lawyers spend their own money and time to achieve justice for injured people, and earn nothing unless we win? We level the playing field for everyday hard-working people who could never afford an hourly lawyer. It is an honor to be a trial lawyer.

As I navigated my plaintiff's practice, I began to understand the importance of CAALA and all it has to offer. I became more involved and eventually joined the Board of Governors, serving as Education Chair. I was then elected Secretary and served as an officer for five years before becoming president. I am also on the CAOC Executive Board and am the immediate past Chair of the LACBA Litigation Section. I serve on the LASC Bench Bar Committee and Co-Chair the LASC Bench Bar Employment Law Working group.

Thank you for allowing me to tell my story. I am honored to advance our causes on your behalf and to be your 2022 President. Contact me at any time (dsilverstein@californialaborlawattorney.com) with questions or ideas on how CAALA can better serve you.