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In This Issue

Environmental Laws and Human Health

Stress Relief in Stressful Times

Civil Law and Health...An Amusing Update

The \$250,000 Recovery Limit of the
Medical Insurance Compensation Reform
Act: A Curse or a Benefit?

HITECH's Impact on Health Care Defense
Litigation: Two Common Scenarios

Capitalists Make for Lousy Pharmacists

Unmasking the Truth

U.S. Supreme Court to Review Controversial
Women's Health Issues in 2016

Frazzle or Focus: How to Cope with the
Unique Challenges of Legal Practice



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OPPOSING COUNSEL: WILLIAM D. SHAPIRO

by Bruce E. Todd

The legal reputation of William "Bill" Shapiro has aged like a fine wine.

In 2015, the long-time member of The American Board of Trial Advocates was honored as the CAL-ABOTA California Trial Lawyer of the Year. Thus, he joined a very small fraternity of Inland Empire attorneys to achieve this honor including Donald C. Brown, Florentino Garza and Jeffrey Raynes.

Shapiro's path was not always on course to become a first class lawyer. About the time he was graduating from high school and entering Chaffey College in the early 1970's, he was interested in pursuing a career as a stock car driver. He participated in various National Hot Rod Association (NHRA) races. He realized, however, that this was going to an expensive career.

"I got my doors blown off in some races", he said in referring to some of his better financed competitors. "I had an epiphany and decided that I would have to get my act together and find a real job."

He completed his schooling at Chaffey College and then started at Cal State Fullerton. He obtained a degree as a Physical Education major in 1974 and was all set to start a coaching job at Valencia High School in Placentia. He said that he was out for a run one day on State College Blvd. in Fullerton and observed that a tall building was under construction for a new law school (Western State College of Law). At that very moment, he decided that he wanted to go to law school. He inquired the next day about entering into the program.

"It was the single best decision that I made in my entire life," said Shapiro.

While he was in law school, he met two classmates who would become extremely influential upon the course of his legal career—Tim Peach and Bill Weathers (currently the name partners of the San Bernardino based personal injury law firm of Peach & Weathers). Peach's father's Robert was operating a firm called Hayton & Peach in San Bernardino. Shapiro and his new friends started working in 1975 as law clerks for the firm. During this time, he also eventually became the student body president at Western State—where he was eventually inducted into the school's "Hall of Fame".

After Robert Peach and his law partner Arthwell Hayton (whose daughter Terry is now Weather's wife) split their legal practice, it eventually became Peach, Shapiro



William D. Shapiro

& Peach in 1979. Weathers moved along to a stint as an insurance defense attorney at Thompson & Colegate in Riverside.

Shapiro remained with PS&P until 1983. He then decided that he wanted to start his own law firm. In 1983, he started the Law Offices of William D. Shapiro and he specialized in plaintiff's personal injury litigation. It was particularly during this time that Shapiro developed a reputation as one of the top personal injury attorneys in the Inland Empire, and for that matter, in California. He handled many high

profile cases ranging from products liability to medical malpractice to everything in between.

He eventually decided in 2010 to merge his law firm with a highly respected Orange County personal injury law firm headed by Mark P. Robinson, Jr. The two law firms morphed into Robinson Calcagnie Robinson Shapiro & Davis and it is at this law firm where Shapiro is currently hanging his shingle.

Although the firm's main office is in Newport Beach, Shapiro operates its San Bernardino office. He has fond memories of the Inland Empire and he has developed numerous long lasting friendships with other attorneys in the IE. He prefers the area's small town collegiality. He also has great respect for the caliber of attorneys in the Inland Empire.

"I have practiced all up and down the state and I have yet to see a legal community like there is in the Inland Empire," he says. "The bar here—I have the closest of friends—my closest friends are lawyers here."

This writer has had numerous cases with Shapiro in the past and, besides finding him to be a feared but respected adversary, I have observed that he is also one of the most personable, humble and civil people that one will ever meet. He is extremely well respected by his peers in the legal community. This explains why he has received numerous awards from various legal organizations honoring his civility.

What is also refreshing about his outlook on his personal injury practice is that a trial victory is not necessarily about the money. It is also about the beneficial effects which the outcome might have on the community. For example, he recently prevailed in a trial against an Inland Empire city. His client was injured when the client's vehicle struck a metal box which Shapiro contended had been

placed too close to the roadway. After the verdict, he was approached by one of the jurors who explained that the jury was concerned that the box may present a danger to other motorists. The juror wanted to know what could be done to remove it (which was ultimately done by the city).

"The power of the jury is so important because their primary concern was that they wanted the city to make the repairs," he said.

Shapiro has now been practicing since 1979. He has seen many changes—some better and some worse—in the legal community. When questioned about what he would advise a new lawyer fresh out of law school, he had these tips.

"I would tell them the concept of fulfilling your word and protecting the relationships which you establish," he said. "Don't think that there is going to be a finish line and don't think that someone is going to think that you are weak because you are being cordial."

This advice should be taken seriously because it comes from someone whose resume reads like a "lawyer's lawyer". Besides his membership in ABOTA, he is in the International Academy of Lawyers, the International Society of Barristers and the American College of Trial Lawyers. He has been a past president of the San Bernardino County Bar Association, American Inns of Court (Joseph B. Campbell Chapter) and the Consumer Attorneys of the Inland Empire.

A kind of Renaissance man, Shapiro's interests do not solely lie in the law. He is a respected guitarist (particularly pedal steel) who was the founder member of a country-rock group called Thunder Road.

"I got into music as a kid," he said. "My mom bought me a guitar from a White Front store when I was about 12 years old."

In the 1980's and 1990's, he was member of a band called "Justice" which was well known within the local legal community. Their gigs at such places as the Cask 'n Cleaver attracted many members (lawyers, judges, secretaries, court reporters, etc.) of the legal community. The band included other notable local attorneys including Rob Nagby, Paul Burkhart, Vinnie Nolan and, of course, his old buddy Tim Peach.

When he was a member of the aforementioned Thunder Road from approximately 1996 to 2007, the band played many gigs in Las Vegas and opened for such country music luminaries as Crystal Gayle, Keith Urban and Toby Keith. For some reason, which Shapiro cannot completely comprehend, the band was more famous in Europe and even had a number one hit titled "Take It Like A Man" in seven countries. The band was once nominated as the Country Artist of the Year by the European Music Association.

Shapiro is also an avid collector of classic vehicles (particularly Chevrolets) and a sizeable garage at his law

office is stocked with Corvettes, Camaros and other vintage roadsters. He even still has his old van (restored to near mint condition) which he drove in his college days.

He lives with his wife Sue and he periodically enjoys scuba diving (he even has an instructor's license). He has three boys (Matt, Brian and Kevin). Bill was the first member of his family to ever become involved in the legal profession but Brian is scheduled to graduate from law school this spring. Matt is considering the legal profession while Kevin is working on obtaining his master's degree in architecture.

The local legal community is truly honored to have someone of Shapiro's skilled, yet humble and civil, reputation as one of its members.

Bruce E. Todd, a member of the Bar Publications Committee, is with the firm of Osman & Associates in Redlands.



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