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# FULL CIRCLE

## Bill Shapiro's Seemingly Nonstop Success Is Not By Chance

by Karen Gorden

**It's** incredibly hard not to like Bill Shapiro, founder of the aptly named Law Offices of William D. Shapiro. Friendly and light-hearted, Shapiro has an easy laugh, and comes across humble and a pretty mellow guy. As he closes in on 4 decades of advocacy, and having secured his place as one of California's best trial lawyers, this guitar playing, classic car loving, scuba diving, husband and father-of-three plaintiff's attorney is quick to describe just how rewarding it is to be one of many trial lawyers who are able to help "regular people and families" put their lives back together after sustaining devastating injuries and the loss of loved ones.

Shapiro is proud that the effect of the cases he handles reaches far beyond providing recovery for his clients. "The impact of our cases extends beyond each particular case, our work provides for safer drivers, roadways, products, and so much more which prevents others from suffering the losses our clients have." This attitude, along with his passion, skill and experience, is at the heart of what has propelled Shapiro to the top of the legal community. Such is evidenced by his inclusion in the prestigious invitation-only fellowships of the American College of Trial Lawyers, the International Academy of Trial Lawyers, the International Society of Barristers, as well as being a "Diplomate," the highest distinction of the American Board of Trial Advocates (ABOTA). Indeed, Shapiro is one of the most well respected trial lawyers not only the state, but the nation.

Yet Shapiro's modest, affable nature almost belies his enviable track record in the courtroom and status in the legal community. Talking with Shapiro feels a lot like talking with a friend—who while currently serving as National Secretary for ABOTA, happens to have been named, 2013 *Trial Lawyer of the Year* by the Orange County Trial Lawyers Association and the San Bernardino County Bar Association, the 2014 Trial Lawyer of the Year by the Consumer Attorneys of California, Inland Empire, the 2015 *California Trial Lawyer of the Year* by Cal ABOTA and the 2016, *Trial Lawyer of the Year* by the Western San Bernardino County Bar Association.

While his friendly, easy going personality makes him easy to like, his extraordinary victories on behalf of countless injured victims or heirs of family members coupled with the work he's done making the community safer, along with his tireless efforts to give back to the legal community, make it nearly impossible not to respect him. But to hear Shapiro tell it, "This is what I was destined to do, I love what I do. I represent people who are relying on me, who trust me with their future. I'm passionate about my clients; I'm 'all in' on my work; emotionally, financially, I give each case everything I've got," he explains. "I've raised my 3 sons stressing, the harder you work the luckier you get, and there's just no substitute for hard work, in law, in sports, in music, in everything. Hard work produces results."

### Arc of Success

After spending more than five years as a name partner with Robinson Calcagnie Robinson Shapiro Davis, Inc., Shapiro recently returned to his roots as head of his own smaller powerhouse firm. He has nothing but praise for good friend and former partner Mark Robinson and all the lawyers and staff at RCRSD, insisting he's a better attorney for having spent time with them. "Everything continues to be so positive in regards to my relationship with the firm, unusual when it comes to lawyers making such decisions," he says. Chuckling, he adds, "Which is why I didn't really leave the firm, I'm still 'Of Counsel' with Robinson Calcagnie Inc., and am still working cases with the firm."

Shapiro explains that his decision to return to his roots and resume helping his own firm is simply what suits him best. "I'm naturally more suited to running a small firm; that's what I did for over thirty years. I have a tremendous staff with me, Debbie, Donna, Craig and in working with Justin King and all aboard, I've been able to be selective, and limit the number of cases accepted," he adds.

But make no mistake, although he's technically downsized







his firm, the cases he's taking and winning are by no stretch of the imagination, small cases. Shapiro continues to take on giant insurance companies, trucking companies, manufacturers, property owners and public entities when their negligent truck/auto drivers, defective products or dangerous conditions and properties cause injuries and deaths. More importantly, he consistently secures incredible victories for his clients, and the community at large.

One such case, which made recent headlines, not only resulted in a win for his client, but once again resulted in making the community safer. In this case, Shapiro represented a 70-year-old husband whose wife was killed in an auto accident. "When entering a turn, her car drifted slightly out of the lane striking a cement box that was a few feet off the side of San Timoteo Canyon Road in the city of Redlands. The city denied it was dangerous and further, claimed it was not on their property," Shapiro recalls. In the jury trial against the City, Shapiro explained precisely why a giant cement block, mere feet off the roadway was a classic dangerous condition, as it was foreseeable that people will slightly drift out of the lane. The jury made it clear to the city that they agreed it was a dangerous condition and when something is that close to the roadway, it makes the roadway dangerous.

However, even after Shapiro secured this multi-million-dollar jury verdict for his client, the city failed to remove the dangerous concrete box. With the case over, Shapiro continued to fight to have the structure removed by offering to personally pay the costs of removal. That proved unnecessary as he ultimately achieved his goal. "Within a week of the offer, the city removed the box, and motorists are safer for it. This case demonstrates how trial lawyers truly can make a difference in providing for a safer community, making sure others don't have to go through something like this," he says.

Shapiro's passion for people becomes increasingly palpable when discussing cases such as this. "As trial lawyers, we hear

the word 'No' all of the time. The Redlands case was a perfect example of how the American jury system, the American Courtroom is the ultimate neutralizer. There is nothing like our jury system. No matter who you are, no matter what your status, how much money or power you have, the American jury system ensures that every individual has the right to seek full justice from those who are responsible for their injuries or losses. Our 7th Amendment guarantees the right to a jury trial where regular members of the community dictate the outcome. You can't get better than that," he says.

Shapiro stresses the jury system is an "*equal opportunity*" system providing defendants the same absolute right. Not all cases are meritorious and like plaintiffs, those accused of wrongdoing have the right to defend their position. "Our jury system protects the rights of everyone, plaintiffs and defendants alike; the bottom line is when there is a dispute over accountability, there is just nothing like the American jury in an American Courtroom."

## Endless Effort for Everyday People

Shapiro's passion for the law and community is matched only by his determination to make things better for the individuals he represents. By way of example, in just the past year alone, Shapiro has secured millions for clients in many cases, including the family of Luc Van Bui, who was killed when a sheriff's deputy crashed into Bui's car in Twentynine Palms.

"I'm very proud of all my cases, each stands out in its own way, much like the Bui case," he says. "Having served in the South Vietnamese army, Mr. Bui was imprisoned when the war ended. Years after his release, it took nearly a decade to smuggle 4 of his 5 children to the United States. Mr. Bui endured more than 2 years of having lost contact with his daughters who were in camps in the Philippines. He finally succeeded in getting his family here safely, only to be killed by a speeding officer," Shapiro says. In the



end, although Shapiro admits that no amount of money would make up for the family's loss, he acknowledges that the nearly \$4 Million he was able to secure for Bui's family will help the family enormously.

In yet another recent case in Sacramento, he was able to make things at least a bit better for a family who suffered tremendously as the result of devastating medical negligence. "The Manzos were young Sacramento newlyweds, ecstatic to find a year after the wedding, they were expecting. For 9 months all was perfect until the day the baby was born, discolored, not breathing and lifeless. The crash team was able to resuscitate the baby who survived, but suffered irreversible brain injuries, and has Cerebral Palsy requiring lifetime care," Shapiro explains. They reached out to Shapiro to find out why this had happened.

"After years of investigation, experts and litigation, it was found in the many hours of labor, there were signs of fetal distress and the baby should have been delivered by C-Section. For 5 years the doctors and hospital denied any negligence but just before trial, a multi-million-dollar settlement was reached," he says. "The defendants knew they would face a jury trial, and I knew the jury would agree with our position, so they wanted to avoid that."

Continuing, Shapiro says with a smile, "My clients are great people; great parents and the recovery secured for this little boy will make a big difference for him by providing the care he'll need. These are regular working people, and this settlement is going to make things at least a little bit easier for the family."

## What Goes Around Comes Around

Suffice it to say, with such a long, impressive track record of succeeding in securing justice for regular people, Shapiro remains in high demand from victims, and the legal community alike. In addition to teaching Civil Trial Practice as an Assistant Professor on the adjunct faculty of Western State College of Law, for the last 6 years, he has been on the faculty of the ABOTA Trial College at Harvard Law School as well as being a faculty member of the American Bar Association's Trial Academy held annually at the National Judicial College in Reno, Nevada. Over his career, Shapiro has been asked and has lectured nationwide and internationally on various aspects of trial, strategy and development, including many Masters in Trial and other Masters presentations.

"It's an honor to teach and give back; I am humbled to be on faculty for these organizations. It's always been important to me to give back, so I've made it a priority my entire career," he says. "In addition to teaching, I'm active in pro bono work at Legal Aid and I'm proud to have served on the Executive Board of our Legal Aid Society for the past 36 years."

Likewise, Shapiro has held leadership roles in numerous legal associations over the years including serving as Past President of the San Bernardino/Riverside Chapter of ABOTA, Past President of the San Bernardino County Bar Association, Past President of American Inns of Court, Joseph B. Campbell Chapter and as Past President of Consumer Attorneys of Inland Empire. The current



Collection of Corvettes and muscle cars in Bill's office garage.

National Secretary and National Chair of the Awards Committee of ABOTA, Shapiro also serves on the Board of Directors and Membership Committee of the International Academy of Trial Lawyers, the State Board of Governors for Consumer Attorneys of California as well as the Executive Boards of both the Inland Empire Chapters of the Consumer Attorneys and ABOTA.

In addition to donating his time and experience, Shapiro donates money and resources to support law students. Together with his wife, years ago Shapiro established the “William and Susan Shapiro Scholarship” for students at Western State University, College of Law, providing two scholarships to two deserving students.

“I’m fortunate to have accomplished many things in law, but my greatest and most treasured accomplishment is being a good husband and father. Susan has shared my many passions for so long with patience and pride and I couldn’t be more proud of my three sons. Matt (28) is in his first year of law school, Brian (26) recently graduated and is awaiting bar results and Kevin (24) is earning his Master’s Degree in Architecture at USC. If there is a gem in my life, it’s my family.”

Shapiro says he made the choice to work hard, and to be the best he could be early in his life. As to results of excellence, he quotes Don Henley who once said of the vocal harmonies of the Eagles, “Henley said, ‘do you hear that? . . . That’s not an accident . . . that’s hard work.’ Such is the case in everything in life including success in law. Such is how I describe the work I’ve tried to accomplish. It’s not luck, it didn’t just happen. Whatever success I’ve been able to achieve in my life came from hard work. That is the lesson I’ve raised my sons with, that is the lesson my father taught me.”

Rest assured, although Shapiro has already achieved an elite standing in the legal community as one of the premier personal injury trial attorneys in the nation, he has no plans to slow down. “I will never, ever retire completely. And I’m secretly harboring a dream that one day I’ll practice law with my sons Brian and Matt with Kevin designing the building, but we’ll have to see,” he laughs.

“I’m in a sweet spot in my career and in my life, happy in so many ways. I absolutely love what I do. There has never been a dull moment in the last 40 years; I tell people I live the ‘Discovery Channel.’ But the best part, while it’s a lot of work; the cliché is true, ‘when you love what you do, it never seems like work, carry on.’” ■

#### Contact

William D. Shapiro  
Law Offices of William D. Shapiro  
839 East Brier Dr.  
San Bernardino, CA 92408  
P: (909) 890-1000  
F: (909) 890-1001  
bill@wshapiro.com  
www.wshapiro.com

## EXPERIENCE

### » EDUCATION

- Western State University College of Law, Fullerton, California  
Juris Doctor – 1978  
Phi Alpha Delta Legal Fraternity, Charter Member
- California State University, Fullerton, California  
California State Teaching Credential, K-12 – 1975
- California State University, Fullerton, California  
Bachelor of Science, Physical Education – 1974
- Chaffey College, Alta Loma, California  
Associate of Arts, General Education – 1972

### » RECOGNITION

- “Best Lawyers in America” U.S. News & World Report
- “SuperLawyer,” Los Angeles Times Magazine
- “Best Lawyers in Orange County,” Orange County Register, Metro
- “Best Lawyers in Inland Empire,” Inland Empire Magazine
- “Top One Percent in the Nation,” National Association of Distinguished Counsel
- “Top 100 Trial Lawyers,” National Lawyers of America
- “Top 50 list for Orange County,” Los Angeles Times
- “Best Firms,” U.S. News & World Report, Best Lawyers in America
- “Southern California’s Top Rated Lawyers,” American Law Magazine, published in LA Times
- “Certified Specialist in Civil Trial Advocacy,” Specialization by State Bar of California
- Board Certification in Civil Trial Advocacy; National Board of Trial Advocacy
- “A-V Preeminent,” One of the Pre-eminent lawyers in America, Martindale-Hubbell

### » AWARDS

- Lawyer of the Year – IE, Best Lawyers in America, 2017
- Jennifer Brooks, Lawyer of the Year – WSBCBA, 2016
- Trial Lawyer of the Year, Cal ABOTA – 2015
- Trial Lawyer of the Year, – Consumer Attorneys of Inland Empire, 2014
- Top Gun, Trial Lawyer of the Year – Orange County Trial Lawyers Association, 2013
- John B. Surr Award – presented by the San Bernardino County Bar Association: Awarded to the Member of the Legal Community Who has Best Exemplified the High Standards of the Profession and the Administration of Justice, 2013
- Matthew Kearney Award – pro bono services
- Access to Justice Award – Legal Aid
- Kleps Award – 4th District Court of Appeal

