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PLEASANT SURPRISE

Bill Shapiro never expected to become one of OC's top trial attorneys, but talent and passion coupled with a commitment to civility and desire to create positive changes in the world have made him precisely that for 37 years and counting.

by Jennifer Hadley

I received some terrific advice right after passing the Bar. A great lawyer told me: Do everything you can to preserve a reputation of integrity, credibility, reliability, and being a man of your word," says William D. Shapiro, AV-rated trial attorney and partner at Robinson Calcagnie Robinson Shapiro Davis, Inc. (RCRSD). For nearly 40 years, Shapiro has taken that advice to heart, putting everything he has into the exclusive litigation and trials of personal injury and wrongful death cases on behalf of those victimized by negligent driving and conduct, defective products and roadways.

Yet to hear Bill tell it, he never had big dreams of becoming one of Southern California's "Top Rated Lawyers," nor did he imagine he'd be named to lists such as the *U.S. News & World Report's* "Best Lawyers in America," or one of the "Top 100 Trial Lawyers" as ranked by *National Lawyers of America*. Shapiro is also a Fellow in the American College of Trial Lawyers, a Fellow in the International Academy of Trial Lawyers, a Fellow in the International Society of Barristers, and an Advocate in the American Board of Trial Advocates. He certainly never expected to be named "Trial Lawyer of the Year" by both the Orange County Trial Lawyers Association and the Consumer Attorneys of the Inland Empire or to receive the nomination for "Trial Lawyer of the Year" by Cal ABOTA. On the contrary, Bill merely wanted to be someone who helped create positive change.

"I am one of many trial attorneys who have been able to make a positive change in the world. Trial lawyers care about people. Contrary to what people may think, we aren't just out for ourselves. Those of us who do this day in and day out know that the biggest enjoyment we get is from being able to

help people and create change. We help get unsafe products off of the market, we help create laws to protect people and we help those who are gravely injured to have some quality of life. If we waited for government to make these changes, we'd still be waiting. So I know that one person really can make a difference," he says.

TAPPING INTO TALENT

However, as a young man, Shapiro's dreams were simpler. "While earning my B.S. in Physical Education, and a California teaching credential, my plan was to go into teaching and coaching. I knew I wanted to work with and help people," he says. "But on a daily run up State College Blvd, I noted the newly placed words 'School of Law' on a building I saw being built. I thought to myself: Could I? That set in motion the challenge of my life. My admission to law school began my infatuation and infection with the law and it's been that way ever since. I am so thankful for that fateful run. That day not only changed my life, but guided me to what was to be my calling. My love of the law has never diminished."

As soon as he began clerking for a personal injury firm, he knew he'd found his area of practice. "I loved the challenge posed by plaintiff's personal injury litigation. I savored being creative, digging, investigating, burning midnight oil to get a leg up, maximizing on preparation so as not to be out-prepared. I was hungry then and remain hungry to this day," he says. Thus, after being admitted to the Bar, Shapiro returned to the firm and became a partner in Peach, Shapiro & Peach





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Top Left to Right: Partners Scot D. Wilson, Daniel S. Robinson, Karen Barth Menzies, Allan F. Davis and Bill Shapiro.
Bottom Left to Right: Partners Kevin F. Calcagnie, Mark P. Robinson and Jeoffrey L. Robinson.

in 1979. By 1983, he'd opened his own practice, which he ran to tremendous success before ultimately partnering with Mark Robinson to merge his practice in 2010, forming RCRSD.

Along the way, Shapiro learned to look for inspiration from others, to help him to become the type of lawyer and the type of man he wanted to be. "Over the years I had observed many people and noted there are some things I like about some people and some things I'll do without. I have long studied great trial lawyers, great athletes, great musicians, great people—and some not so great—but I still learn something and take it home," he says.

By way of example, he recalls trying a case in his first year as a trial attorney, facing off against nationally renowned defense attorney John Costanzo. "We were representing a quadriplegic suing a major auto manufacturer. The senior partner at my firm wanted to refer it, but I wanted to try it. When it came up for trial I had only tried 2 soft tissue cases. The trial lasted 4 months and I think I learned more in that trial than I did in law school. I lost the case, but John invited me to his office after I reversed the verdict on appeal and settled the case. I was humbled by his compliments on my effort, skill and fortitude. I learned how to not be afraid to lose. As a trial lawyer, you can't be afraid to lose."

But Shapiro also knows that he's learned a lot from those outside of the legal field, citing UCLA Coach John Wooden as someone who he admires. "His teachings should be studied by all. [He] promotes learning and mastering the fundamentals; always being prepared; doing your talking with action not words. These are the things I strive to conquer in each case and in everything I do. I ask my staff all of the time: If this was your

case, what would you expect your lawyer to be doing?"

Shapiro also says that many other great attorneys and friends have helped him to develop his own style of lawyering. "A great friend of mine has a commandment which I subscribe to and strive towards: Be nice, to everybody, all of the time. Another great lawyer told me: Never try a case for the wrong reason. Yet another attorney told me: Always handle a case like it was your mother's case. I try to live by these, and share these tips with young lawyers I mentor or those I teach," he says.

RESPECT FOR OTHERS: A FIRM'S STRENGTH

It was Shapiro's ability to recognize the strengths in others which would ultimately lead him to merge his practice with likeminded attorneys. "After working closely with Mark Robinson Jr. in Orange County, we decided to merge my practice in 2010 to form Robinson Calcagnie Robinson Shapiro Davis," he says. "We are a trial law firm of 30 lawyers with offices in Orange County, Los Angeles and the Inland Empire. Eight partners are joined by 22 associates making up the trial teams for our clients. Assistants, paralegals, legal secretaries, investigators and other staff members are a critical part of our trial teams and we're proud of the depth of each litigation trial team. Whether an individual case, mass tort or class action, each litigation is handled by teams who see each case through to the end. In addition to our talented paralegal and legal secretarial staff, we include in-house nurses, a full investigation team, an IT crew,

as well as skilled and knowledgeable assistants who handle everything needed for our trial efforts.”

RCRSD is a full litigation firm with the utmost respect for the clients it serves. “Handling the types of cases we handle takes depth. It takes depth of skill, knowledge, resources and desire. These cases are expensive and to get the results our clients are entitled to, it truly takes a comprehensive legal team, and the legal resources RCRSD is willing to provide. After nearly 37 years of handling only these types of cases, and surrounding ourselves with attorneys and staff who do nothing but sophisticated and catastrophic cases, I’m proud to say we provide among the best in product liability/personal injury legal services,” Shapiro says.

The desire to win for deserving clients has resulted in a firm of attorneys who have what Shapiro calls a respectful “bedside manner.” “The notion of bedside manner is not only critical in the medical field, it’s essential in the legal field. Clients entrusting their case to us have the right to know what is good and what is not so good. They can take it, if it’s delivered in the right manner. We keep clients posted on the good, the bad and the ugly, as we never want a situation where reality doesn’t set in until the trial. By keeping clients and our referring attorneys posted on cases, they are knowledgeable and prepared for what is coming. Too many lawyers fail to just tell their clients the true status. This does nothing but create distance and conflict, so at RCRSD we keep our clients well-informed,” Shapiro explains.

When it comes to working with fellow attorneys, whether they are referring attorneys or opposing counsel, Shapiro insists on creating a dialogue of civility and respect. “I don’t believe

that cooperation and civility translates into weakness. In fact, I believe just the opposite. By being cooperative and treating others as you’d expect to be treated, you are demonstrating the true strength of your case,” he says.

This respect for everyone from Shapiro and his colleagues has resulted in a caseload that includes countless referrals of catastrophic and mass tort cases from attorneys nationwide. “We are honored to have our referring lawyers and over the last 5 years, we have paid millions of dollars of referral fees and we are happy to do so. We understand that just as we don’t handle family, criminal, or estate planning law, many lawyers don’t handle catastrophic personal injury, wrongful death or product liability cases,” Shapiro adds. “We take pride in serving their referrals.”

Furthermore, the reputation that Shapiro and his colleagues have earned has led them to enjoy a nationwide practice. “Having established great relationships around the state and country has provided us the ability to work cases nationwide, as we have associate counsel in virtually every state in the country. This allows us to be involved with many Multidistrict Litigation (MDLs) Class Actions, Pharma cases, and even individual cases.”

RCRSD: THE NEXT 40

With a career that has been marked by award after award of million- and multimillion-dollar verdicts, Shapiro also has multiple published cases, including *Thompson vs. Mercury Casualty Co.* (2000) 84 Cal App 4th 90, and *Lobo vs. Tamco* (2010) 182 Cal App 4th 297, which led to creation of new laws.



There doesn't seem to be much that Shapiro still has left to accomplish, but he has no plans of slowing down. In fact, he plans to continue to work as hard as ever, particularly when it comes to giving back to the legal community.

For more than 30 years, he's dedicated himself to giving back to the legal community in a variety of ways. Since 1980, he's been on the Executive Board of the Legal Aid Society Inland Empire, having served in the clinics on a monthly basis. He has handled countless pro bono cases, and RCRSD continues to welcome those cases on behalf of those less fortunate. Along with his wife, Shapiro also established the "William and Susan Shapiro Scholarship" for students at Western State University, College of Law, years ago. He serves on the Board of Directors of the John Lewis King Scholarship Fund, and supports the Public Law Center in Orange County alongside his colleagues at RCRSD. In addition, Shapiro, along with his partners Mark Robinson and Kevin Calcagnie, is dedicated to the teaching of Trial Practice, being on the Adjunct faculty of Western State University, College of Law, and UCI Law School.

Not surprisingly, Shapiro has no doubt that good things are in store for the future of RCRSD. "RCRSD will continue to grow. We have tremendous talent, with skillful and dedicated partners and lawyers who have every reason to believe the firm will grow and flourish. We are paperless, with communication features that are second to none. We bring technology into the courtrooms as well as into depositions. But what we are most proud of is that we have a full command of the fundamentals of the law. Irrespective of technology, the fundamentals of law must still be practiced and we strive to master that. There are no short cuts, no excuses, and nothing is half-done."

As for when Shapiro is not working to help victims of catastrophic personal injury or heirs who've lost loved ones, create change or educate others, he's typically enjoying time playing the pedal steel guitar, lead guitar and banjo in a country rock group, having Sunday dinners with his three sons or scuba diving with his wife.

Yet for someone as accomplished as Shapiro, he remains remarkably humble in regard to the success he's realized, and the positive changes he's been able to make. "It was unexpected, but I guess I did pretty well," he says simply. ■

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EXPERIENCE



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» 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 100 Trial Lawyers, National Lawyers of America
- RCRSD, named One of America's 30 Most Influential Law Firms by *Trial Lawyer Magazine*
- Southern California's Top Rated Lawyers, *American Law Magazine*, published in *LA Times*
- A-V Preeminent, One of the Preeminent lawyers in America, Martindale-Hubbell
- Certified Specialist in Civil Trial Advocacy, Specialization by State Bar of California
- Board Certification in Civil Trial Advocacy, National Board of Trial Advocacy
- Master, Joseph B. Campbell INN's of Court
- Recognition for expertise in Bad Faith, Personal Injury & Product Liability Trials, Consumer Attorneys of California
- California Judicial College, Attorney participant (1986)

» AWARDS

- Trial Lawyer of the Year, 2014 Consumer Attorneys of California, Inland Empire Chapter;
- John B. Surr Award, 2013, 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
- Top Gun, Trial Lawyer of the Year, 2013, Orange County Trial Lawyers Association
- Trial Lawyer of the Year, 2013 nomination, Consumer Attorneys of Los Angeles