

INSPIRATION – A LABOR DAY WEEKEND IN LAS VEGAS WITH
OVER 2,200 CAALA MEMBERS

I write this after coming home from probably the best Las Vegas Convention ever. I am tired, but I feel re-energized to be back in the ring and fight for the justice we all believe in.

It is so frightening to watch the evening news these days. It is a quick reminder of how important democracy and justice is for all of us. I think about the many people who have given their lives for the freedoms that we enjoy as a Country, including the right to a trial by jury. Now, incredibly in 2014, we are seeing American journalists being beheaded in medieval fashion on videotapes sent out into the Internet as a warning to all of us who believe in freedom and justice.

I do not feel like we need to look very hard to find inspiration in America. We have volunteers who help the poor, the disadvantaged and the weak and hopeless. We have volunteers who go out into other countries to help people with so little to be thankful for. We have lawyers who will invest their own money and work on a case for years with the hope of winning and finding justice for their own clients.

This weekend, I sat in on the Masters session with Browne Greene, Genie Harrison, Arash Homampour, Carney Shegerian, Jack Denove and Carl Douglas. Talk about inspiration!

Browne Greene reached out to all of us about what it means to be a trial lawyer. He spoke from the heart about how excited he is to start picking a jury in the next week. He spoke about how important it is for all of us to follow through and get Proposition 46 passed for the consumers of this State.

Genie Harrison spoke about her first client. It was emotional and it was personal. It was her brother, who used to get beaten up every night when her abusive father would come home from work. Finally, when she was old enough, I think she said about age 10, she stepped in and tried to stop the cycle of abuse of her brother. As she spoke about her personal experience, it was an amazing moment. You could hear a pin drop in a room filled with over 800 people. To hear such a riveting and personal story from one of our sister trial lawyers -- well, it's something I will never forget. I was truly inspired.

Arash Homampour started out his presentation by referring to a rap song that he wove throughout his speech written by JZ and Biggie Smalls. In essence, it talked about your first being your last and your last being your first. It was a very clever speech and one that was unique and unlike anything that I have never heard before. However, most impressive to me was a moment when Arash ventured away from the trial theme and started talking about his own failures. Arash, who has never been accused of being a shrinking violet when it comes to confidence, got up and exposed his failures and the embarrassment of not passing the Bar after all of his friends had passed it the first time. His emotion was real and it was raw. I think Arash touched everyone in the room that Saturday afternoon in Las Vegas.

Jack Denove spoke about his inspirations and his failures in being a trial lawyer. He spoke about his fear of failure and most impressively about the history of our members fighting for what's right. He showed some amazing slides of people getting out and marching in the streets for Propositions 200, 201 and 202 and he recalled how we always answered the bell. During the course of the afternoon, we raised close to \$240,000 to fight in favor of Proposition 46.

Carney Shegerian showed us why being humble and true to your roots works with a jury and with a crowd of over 800 trial lawyers in the room. Honestly, if there is a more authentic, humble, nice person in our Association, I would really like to meet him or her.

Finally, Carl Douglas got up and pointed out that his mother was in the audience. He went on to give one of the best, most dynamic, inspirational speeches of all time. Some of the topics he touched on include the fear of losing and never giving up. He explained what it was like to feel like he won every case as a Federal Public Defender only to be greeted with a guilty verdict on almost every case over several years when he started out as a trial lawyer. As Carl spoke, I had a clear view of his mother, who was sitting in the audience. I could see her laugh, I could see her get tearful and, most of all, I could see that she was beaming with pride as she watched her son bring down the house about being a trial lawyer and learning to always be prepared and give it everything you have on every case. Well done Mr. Douglas.

When I think of the amount of work that went into this year's Convention -- almost a year in planning by Cindy Cantu, Stuart Zanville, Kweedi Gibson, Liz Hagan, Martha Ruiz and Bill Smith -- I am truly in awe of what they accomplish. The complexity and the dynamic of putting all these programs together while having a specially themed networking cocktail party every night is really overwhelming. However, year after year, Cindy Cantu and company pull it off. I can't thank all of the staff at CAALA enough for this amazing Convention in Las Vegas 2014. You did it, we did it and everyone is better off as a result of a successful, energetic, fantastic Convention. Thanks to all the speakers, the moderators and the video people, along with all of the vendors that make this whole Convention work. Most importantly, thanks to you, all of the CAALA members who showed up and made this Convention an inspiration and a success. Thank you and God bless.