

## THE INSPIRATION OF PRACTICING LAW (A Law Day Message)

By Mick Marderosian



To be inspired is a lifelong gift that can many times shape who we are and what we do with our lives.

As a young boy, I would watch Perry Mason outsmart his opponent, Hamilton Burger, time and time again through skillful cross examination and presentation of evidence. With the assistance of a very dedicated support staff (his secretary Della Street and investigator Paul Drake) how could you not be impressed and want to become a lawyer yourself?

In my early teens there was the civil rights movement, JFK and *To Kill a Mocking Bird*. I was so impressed with Atticus Finch who defended Tom Robinson. I loved his image, his role as the underdog lawyer against all odds defending a young African American man accused of raping a white woman before an all-white male jury in the south. What I remember the most was the closing argument he delivered stressing the point that justice does exist, even under trying times and difficult circumstances, when he passionately stated:

Now, gentlemen, in this country our courts are the great levelers. In our courts, all men are created equal. I'm no idealist to believe firmly in the integrity of our courts and of our jury system. That's no ideal to me - that is a living, working reality! Now I am confident that you gentlemen will review without passion the evidence that you have here, come to a decision, and restore this man to his family. In the name of God, do your duty. In the name of God, believe Tom Robinson. - *Atticus Finch*

In college at U.C. Berkeley, I went to see another fellow gradu-

ate speak, the late Melvin Belli. I have never forgotten his style and eloquence, delivered perfectly through an accent that seemed to be a developed blend of someone from the UK but who lived and worked in America. He spoke with a cadence and rhythm similar to that of actor Jim Backus of Gilligan's Island fame and his dress and appearance were certainly slick. Without a doubt he stood out. He had a distinct style and image that prevented you from taking your eyes off of him.

Then as a young lawyer, I saw the film *The Verdict* starring Paul Newman. He portrayed Frank Galvin, the once respected Boston lawyer who had fallen into the bottle and onto hard times but who had been given a gift when he took on a medical malpractice case that was "on the ropes" and sinking quickly on the eve of trial. Up against a difficult judge, a skillful yet deceitful defense attorney played by James Mason and clients that had lost faith in him, an insecure Frank Galvin rose to the occasion in presenting his case. I was struck by the fact that in his closing argument, he did not once mention the name of his catastrophically injured client or the facts of the case. Instead he directed his remarks and the jury to focus on the importance of the American system of justice when he stated:

Well, you know, so much of the time we're just lost. We say,

"Please God, tell us what is right. Tell us what is true." I mean there is no justice. The rich win, the poor are powerless. We become tired of hearing people lie. And after a time we become dead, a little dead. We think of ourselves as victims and we become victims. We become weak; we doubt ourselves; we doubt our beliefs; we doubt our institutions; and we doubt the law. But today you are the law. You are the law-not some book, not the lawyers, not a marble statue, or the trappings of the court. See, those are just symbols of our desire to be just. They are, in fact, a prayer, I mean a fervent and a frightened prayer. In my religion, they say "Act as if you had faith; faith will be given to you." If we are to have faith in justice we

need only to believe in ourselves and act with justice. See, I believe there is justice in our hearts. - *Frank Galvin*

And lastly, I remember going to see the great Charles Garry speak here in Fresno in the late 1970s. He was an Armenian man from Selma, California, who had gone on to defend the Black Panthers and members of the Chicago 7 and was a renowned champion of justice, especially against unjust governmental actions. Reading about him in law school and coming from Fowler, California, which is just a few miles from Selma, I had to go see this great lawyer and orator who was known for his great trial skills. However, when he was introduced he initially was too shaken to speak. How could this be? The pause was more than uncomfortable but then, out of nowhere, he collected himself. Now having everyone's undivided attention, he roared like a lion in discussing the injustice of ethnic discrimination and his personal experiences with it as a young boy. He went on to relate these experiences and why he dedicated his life to fighting the injustice of discrimination wherever it existed and in whatever form. This was no act. Justice was in his soul. You could feel it just witnessing this man speak. It was an inspiration.

Every one of these lawyers or portrayals of lawyers inspired me and helped me find my soul as a lawyer. They caused me to realize that good lawyers are not born but are developed through "trial by fire" and through the rigors of practicing law. Through every success and every failure we learn the importance of confronting every challenge without fear of failure or defeat but to work hard at overcoming opposition and adversity in an honorable yet firm fashion. We are the bridge that is available to every citizen so that they receive the benefit of the law and have access to the courts in seeking redress.

As lawyers, we have the ability and obligation to make a difference in the lives of people and inspire them by how we conduct ourselves as practicing lawyers. As advocates, it is not always easy. However, through the continued practice of law, wisdom and civility emerge and develop. As it does, so does our ability to make that difference and inspire others in becoming lawyers or at a minimum, gaining a good respect and understanding of our system of justice. Just as the lawyers referenced above inspired me, we have the same obligation to inspire others to enter the practice of law.

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