

2003 -- YEAR OF THE MEMBER

by L. Tracee Lorens

Tracee Lorens is CASD's President for 2003. Ms. Lorens attended San Diego State University and Western State College of Law (now Thomas Jefferson) obtaining her J.D., B.S.L. in 1990 and was admitted to the California State Bar that same year. She has been a member of Consumer Attorneys of San Diego for nine years and was either a Director or Officer of CASD for the past seven years. She practices primarily in the area of employment law, focusing currently on wage and hour class actions, as well as complex personal injury and insurance bad faith claims. Ms. Lorens is the mother of a beautiful 12-year-old daughter, Alexandra Rose Lorens, and the "significant other" and partner of Wayne A. Hughes. She may be reached by e-mail at CASDPres@aol.com or by calling 619-239-1233.

This column, my first as the incoming president of CASD, was written shortly before Thanksgiving. I have a long list of things for which I give thanks: family, health, the special moments of love and humor, and my profession.

As trial lawyers, we are frequently blessed because we are given the opportunity to help make a difference in the lives of our clients and the greater community. This year I also want to thank the Consumer Attorneys of San Diego for a variety of blessings. First, the fellowship of CASD reminds those of us who work generally in small groups that we are not alone. We are part of a much larger community of warriors for the people. I was one of the many members of the Board of Directors who enthusiastically approved our organization's new slogan: **NEVER STAND ALONE.**

As attorneys representing people whose rights are frequently challenged by large corporations, seemingly unmovable governments, and a host of less than compassionate dark hats, we and our clients need never stand alone.

Second, I am thankful to this organization for what it has allowed me and many others to achieve as professionals. I have been a member of this organization for nine years. As a professional businesswoman, that span of time covers light years of travel. My ability to accelerate my career at “warp speed” was fueled by the resources and networking provided by this organization. I am committed to making these same resources available to the entire membership in the most user friendly means possible.

I remember when I first became a member I looked to the front of the room and wondered what it took to be part of that fellowship of successful attorneys. I hope that when our newer members look to the front of the room what they will see is friends willing to help and to encourage. I hope that this article will enable some to come forward, introduce themselves, say "Hi" and tell me how I can help.

Before I go into some of my proposals for this next year, I thought I'd tell you something about myself. My significant other calls me a “Colorado Mountain Woman”. It is a history of which I am proud. I was raised in Grand Lake, Colorado, a small community northwest of Denver. In my home town the low ground is 8,600 feet surrounded by mountains approximately 12,000 feet high and Rocky Mountain National Park. The mountains were integral to the family which formed me as a person.

When the tourists were not in town, the year round population was about 200 people. During the summer months, Grand Lake is home to the world's highest yacht club and the population grows to 50,000. It is a heritage that encourages the individual and rewards the pioneer spirit.

It is no doubt that I learned to be tenacious and unrelenting from the pioneer women who

traveled to this country (as did my great-grandmother) by horse drawn wagons. I was taught that if you worked hard, didn't give up, and were honest, you could accomplish anything!

My parents divorced when I was 13 years old. My mother embodied the spirit of the Colorado Mountain Woman when as a school teacher she decided to go into business -- the business of garbage collection. She built a multi-million dollar business from the ground up. The men in town had a betting pool as to when she would fail. The most optimistic gambler gave her only ten months. On many occasions I helped drive garbage trucks on icy mountain roads. Our business slogan was "Trashin' is our Passion." After 20 years in business my Mom sold to Waste Management for millions, winning the bet her way.

My dad is a Character, with a capital "C". He worked hard and also comes from a business family who owned a successful plumbing company. Dad doesn't really care much for lawyers in general but I am teaching him slowly what it is that lawyers do for people. While I don't agree with everything he has to say, I do believe that I gained from him a sense of the importance of standing up for one's principles. Debating with Dad for decades has given me skills in advocacy and persistence.

I paid my way through law school buying and selling Volkswagen bugs on the weekend --- buy low, sell not so low. I worked as a cocktail waitress. It was not glamorous. My daughter was born when I was 30, about two weeks before I graduated from law school. Against all advice, I took my baby home to study for the bar and, yes, passed the first time around.

I started my law career as a single mother in December 1990. I began as a young associate for a large plaintiffs' firm running between multiple offices. After a couple of months doing that, Wayne Hughes and I joined forces. We were introduced through a CASD member.

Eventually, we became a team in many wonderful ways. Now, we are a litigation team that gets to take the tension home together. Our secret, as a couple, is a long house which allows us to decompress at opposite ends and work our way back to a more human condition near the middle of the house: the kitchen. Cooking is my passion and end of the day therapy.

We share the long house with our 12-year-old daughter, Alexandra Rose Lorens. She thinks having two lawyers as parents is almost normal. She's a great cheerleader and shows signs of continuing the Colorado Mountain Woman tradition.

Over the past 12 years, I have struggled over my share of broken glass. I understand what it is to have more debts than income, more problems than solutions. Private practice is not always pretty. We have to take great risks, deal with disappointment, stay optimistic, dig through a mountain of stress, and try to keep a sense of humor. Success is not built on a continuous string of victories. Success is the goal we eventually reach by overcoming barriers and defeats along the way.

I want to dedicate this year to the members . . . to all of the members. I want us together to find ways to make the path easier for all. We currently have over 700 members. Our group e-mail system, **List Serve**, has become a "party line" which helps tie us together as a community.

I want to keep **List Serve** as a place for the free exchange of speech and ideas within our family of CASD attorneys. Important ideas have emerged from **List Serve** such as the **List Serve** parties — a function which I hope will become a tradition. Another great gift from **List Serve** has been the scholarship program for high school students. **List Serve** has introduced us to each other and in the jungle of e-mail we have found many of CASD's leaders of the future.

We can't do everything, but many good ideas have emerged which will be part of my agenda for 2003.

High on my list for new membership benefits is an on-line brief bank. I want a good practical way for members to shop for specialized motions and paperwork. Ideally, we should have a way to deliver motions to members in an electronic format to help reduce both lawyer time and work load.

I believe in building greater resources to provide more for the membership. We are looking into the recent suggestion of providing, if possible, equipment such as an Elmo, etc. on a low cost basis to members. Let's level the playing field wherever and whenever possible.

While I am not able to respond to all suggestions, I do read the e-mail on **List Serve**. I have saved the suggestions which we recently requested from the membership. Those suggestions will be brought up at the Board of Directors Retreat in January. Keep your suggestions coming . . . use **List Serve** as a way to stir the creative pot. Feel free to call me at my office (619-239-1233) or e-mail me at **CASDPres@aol.com**.