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## Trial Lawyer Finds His Own Stage

### Theatrical Family Influences Career in Courtroom, Service

By Blair Clarkson

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With sincere apologies to Shakespeare, Antony I. Stuart often feels like all the courtroom's a stage and all the jurors, attorneys and judges merely players.

The president of the Consumer Attorneys Association of Los Angeles, the most powerful trial lawyers group in the state, acquired this unique perspective growing up as a child in an acting family.

Born in Toronto, Canada, to American expatriots, Stuart, 51, was raised in a world of theater and entertainment.

His father was an artist and actor, and his mother, after a stint as a Canadian television and commercial actress, found fame in a recurring role on the long-running soap opera "Days of Our Lives."

"As a kid growing up, I remember hearing my parents having incredibly intense conversations or arguments, maybe even with a blood-curdling scream," he said. "Of course, they were rehearsing. And so, at a very early age, I learned the very fine line between real-life drama and make-believe."

Throughout his childhood, Stuart, now an accomplished trial attorney and principal of the Stuart Law Firm in West Los Angeles, received encouragement from his parents to pursue acting or music.

He played guitar and piano and inherited an artistic hand for sketching and drawing, although he admits he doesn't do much of that anymore unless he finds himself at a particularly boring deposition.

And despite working as an extra on the "Days" set with his mother between UCLA and Loyola Law School, he was never bitten by the acting bug — much to the dismay of his mother, who, after he graduated from Loyola, asked him, not for the first time, whether he wouldn't rather be an artist or an architect.

But Stuart says his parents have had a change of heart.

"They've come to realize that a trial lawyer is an artist, on perhaps the biggest stage, and that



This photo did not appear with the original published article— © A.Stuart

**"A trial lawyer is an artist, on perhaps the biggest stage, and there is no more-compelling drama than what happens in the courtroom," trial lawyer Antony I. Stuart said. "I actually stayed in the family profession, as far as I'm concerned."**

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Stuart, who in 1998 was named one of the state's top 20 attorneys by California Lawyer magazine, believes there is no greater theater than watching the jury foreman or forewoman pass a verdict to the judge.

"You watch the judge's eyes as he reads it over to see how long they linger over the questions. If they pass quickly, you know you have a defense verdict. But if they go slowly, question by question," he said, pausing slightly for effect,

"then you know you've won. That creates a drama in and of itself."

So how did the son of entertainers end up a plaintiffs' attorney, striving to protect the injured? Call it right place, wrong time.

When his parents moved to Los Angeles in the 1960s for his mother's career, a young Stuart found himself a spectator at the chaos of the Watts riots.

When the family visited friends in the Hollywood hills, he stood wide-eyed at the window, watching the city below him burn.

"As an 11-year-old, moving from the socially placid environment in Toronto to this atmosphere of incredible social upheaval just had an impact on me," he said.

Forced into social consciousness at a young age, Stuart said he had been compelled to become a lawyer since he was 14.

"I was driven by the ideal that I could do something with my life to make the world a better place," he said. "And I've tried to hang on to that ideal as best I can."

Stuart's colleagues say he's carried that attitude throughout his career and, because of it, raised the bar for the entire profession.

"He is one of the brightest and most socially conscious lawyers I've ever met," said Bruce A. Broillet, a prominent plaintiffs' attorney at Greene Broillet in Santa Monica. "He sees the significance of the law and the practice thereof as the part of the social fabric that it is."

Stuart began his formative years as a trial lawyer working with Broillet and became a partner at his firm in 1989.

"He pays attention to details while at the same time keeping a vision of the big picture," Broillet added.

Bruce M. Brusavich, a former Consumer Attorneys Association president and name partner at Agnew & Brusavich in Torrance, said, "What makes Tony so effective is just his passion for what he does and his willingness to follow through on it."

When Stuart picked up the association's reins in January, he vowed to use that passion to bring the group's somewhat scattered membership

# Theatrical Family Plays Role for Consumer Attorneys' President

together into a stronger and more cohesive organization.

"One of the things I've tried to do as president is to begin the process of uniting all consumer attorneys around the state," Stuart said.

But it's been a challenge, he contends, because the various state chapters tend to operate independently of one another.

"I have been advocating for years for ways to get all of the local trial lawyers associations affiliated with a state organization so that we have the same singularity of action," he said.

To that end, Stuart and the L.A. association helped sponsor the first "Access to Justice Symposium" at Loyola Law School this year to address the hot-button issue of tort reform, which Stuart believes is the single most important issue facing consumer attorneys today and should provide the impetus for them to form a united front.

Complete with plenary sessions, mock trials and discussion panels with some of the leading advocates for and against tort reform, the symposium's two-fold goal was to dissect the often-conflicting relationship between big business and the civil justice system and to reach out to as many people as possible with the information.

Stuart hoped to reach out to the audience of legal professors, corporate defenders, political advisers, plaintiffs' attorneys and judges to denounce the "scapegoating" of the civil justice system.

"The legal profession has become the scapegoat for all of society's ills," he said. "The president has offered the excuse for the lack of available flu vaccines on pharmaceutical companies not manufacturing any because of a fear of being sued. That is just absolutely untrue.

"If the reason why there's a need for change is because the rules by which the civil justice system operates aren't fair, then let's talk about how to make them more fair. Let's not just impose arbitrary limits on the system. If anything, that's going to make things less fair."

Although Stuart's term as association president ends next month, he plans to continue working to make the yearly conference a permanent fixture and to unify the state's various consumer attorney groups.

His colleagues don't think he'll have any trouble rallying the troops.

"He's a great speaker and articulates his vision so effectively that people tend to follow the path that he has laid out," Broillet said. "He does not push people to a conclusion but rather reasons them to that conclusion."

"He's been a fantastic president," agreed Steven C. Glickman, vice president of the association

and partner at Glickman & Glickman in Beverly Hills. "He brought together a diverse group of people and got us all on the same page."

It's Stuart's collaborative style of leadership that makes his endeavors, like the Loyola symposium, such a success, Glickman said.

"He helps bring together the best people for a job," Glickman said, "and brings out their best qualities."

Though his fellow consumer attorneys rave about his efforts to combat tort reform, Stuart himself considers his work in the field of privacy and First Amendment rights to be his crowning achievement.

Stuart is perhaps best known as lead counsel in a seminal California invasion-of-privacy case that established laws extending a person's protectable right to privacy past the threshold of the house and into the public sphere. *Shulman v. Group W Productions*, 18 Cal.4th 200 (1998).

The case, ironically enough, pitted Stuart against the entertainment industry.

Ruth Shulman was severely injured in an auto accident in 1990 after her car rolled over and the roof crushed in on her.

Fully conscious for the entire ordeal and trapped in the back seat with a broken back, Shulman had to be cut out of the vehicle and airlifted to a hospital.

Without her knowledge, a ride-along cameraman was taping the helicopter paramedic for a reality TV show and had equipped the flight nurse with a wireless mic.

"So the lens and mic brought millions of TV viewers face to face with Shulman's greatest personal tragedy," Stuart said, "the day that she became a paraplegic."

"She made private comments to her rescuers in the context of doctor-patient relationship that were stolen from her by the production company and exploited for the purposes of a dramatic reality TV show."

Although the state Supreme Court ruled that a private individual cannot sue for invasion of privacy if he or she is part of a "newsworthy" event, the justices found that a reporter can be sued, even in pursuit of a legitimate story, if he or she makes an "offensive intrusion" into a private area.

Stuart, who in 2000 was named one of the nation's Three Kings of Privacy in media litigation by Editor and Publisher magazine, hailed the decision as a victory for the First Amendment.

"What was so elating to me as I stood before the Supreme Court," Stuart said, "was the feeling that I was pushing at the boundaries of the law."

While *Shulman* is perhaps his most significant case, Stuart concedes that the case he remembers

most clearly was one of his first, and worst, trips to the courtroom.

As a green 28-year-old in only his third case, Stuart tried a product-liability case for a man who broke his back when his rented backhoe tipped over on the highway.

"I barely knew what I was doing," he said, "and I had all the insecurities of a young lawyer."

The case seemed doomed from the start, because the defense asserted that the man had neglected to use a missing safety device, which would have prevented the accident.

To make matters worse, the defense lawyer and the judge were good friends, and, as Stuart arrived in the morning, the two would be walking out of the judge's chambers slapping each other on the back and guffawing like old high-school chums.

As if that weren't enough, Stuart's expert doctor refused to testify, so he had to subpoena his own expert as a hostile witness.

"In the end, when the vote of the jury was 10-2 for the defendant, I was nearly elated that two jurors had actually seen it my way," he laughed.

Since those rocky days, Stuart has risen to the forefront of the profession, specializing more recently in health insurance fraud and professional malpractice.

And though he has no plans to pursue any new leadership posts after his term ends in January, Stuart remains committed to strengthening the civil justice system and working for the consumer attorney cause as an association board member.

Meanwhile, he intends to focus on his business and his family.

While he has enjoyed the relative simplicity of operating his own two-person law firm since 1997, Stuart concedes that, in these challenging times, he'll need to expand and become more diversified to survive.

"It's great to have a small firm because you can control everything about it," he said, "but when you have to fight the gargantuan battles that consumer attorneys are called upon to fight, you really need heavy resources to support you."

A dedicated family man, Stuart looks first for that support from his wife Karen Stuart, the executive director of the Hollywood-based Association of Talent Agents, and their two children, Ben, 17, and Shayna, 15.

Following his own childhood embroiled in the hoopla surrounding his mother's career, Stuart is reluctantly accepting the fact that the acting bug is still alive and well in his family.

"As much as we try to discourage her, Shayna wants to be an actress just like her grandmother," he said.