

What's Real About Mock Trial

by Rebecca J. Britton



Rebecca Britton's Fayetteville civil litigation practice with Hutchens, Senter & Britton, P.A., concentrates on medical negligence, personal injury, wrongful death, civil rights and sexual assault cases. Since joining the Academy in 1992, she has served on the board, as vice president for public education, as host director for the 2005 National High School Mock Trial Championship, and most recently as president-elect. Britton received the Kelly Crabtree Award in 2002 for her work exonerating Lesly Jean, a former Marine who served nine years in prison for a crime he did not commit. She was named a Super Lawyer by Law & Politics magazine and has been listed in Outstanding Women of the 20th Century. Britton is a 1992 graduate of Campbell University School of Law, where she has taught pretrial litigation as an adjunct professor since 1997.

I still remember the thrill of watching and listening to Chrystal Lee deliver her closing argument at the state finals of the Wade Edwards High School Mock Trial Competition in January 1998. Chrystal was a senior at Westover High School in Fayetteville. She stood with confidence before the jury of scoring judges, and she spoke with conviction.

The case involved an allegedly defective soccer goal that fell over and killed a young child, and how the company allegedly had failed to warn of the defects in the goal. Chrystal argued that unfortunately, the parents had received many warnings about the young person to whom they had entrusted their child on that fateful day. She argued that those warning signs were red waving flags for the parents not to entrust their child to that unreliable and irresponsible youngster. As she spoke, she raised her right arm as if raising and waving a flag. She was wearing a bright red suit.

Chrystal's team won the state championship that year, and it went on to place fifth out of 42 states and two territories in the national competition in Albuquerque, New Mexico.

Chrystal Lee came full circle on November 18, 2007. As I stood before a Lillington courtroom full of parents, teachers, coaches, and competitors to introduce the judges for the final round of the 2006 Wade Edwards High School Mock Trial Competition, I presented Chrystal as an attorney and one of our scoring judges. As I shared Chrystal's history with the student competitors, she beamed and I got misty eyed. The young lady I had coached and pushed and mentored, and considered one of "my kids," was now a grown woman and a professional with a community-minded spirit that will serve our profession well.

I also remember watching a young man named Herman Bright. Herman was one

of Westover High School's best and most serious witnesses. He was the perfect professor and the consummate police officer—he never lost his cool and always had a solid answer. Herman called me last year to tell me that after finishing his engineering degree, he had decided to teach. He was teaching at a high school in Asheville. Herman told me how important it was for him to mentor the kids he taught, and how rewarding it was for him to be able to make a difference in their lives. He said he knew how important mentors are to kids at that age.

Kevin Hight, who teaches AP Government and History at Terry Sanford High School and serves as teacher advisor for the school's Mock Trial teams, once talked about the amazing transformation he had seen in students participating in the Mock Trial program. He described one of his students, Spencer Harrison, who was obviously bright, but very quiet. Spencer got involved in Mock Trial and, through his involvement in the program, transformed from a quiet kid to an involved and confident kid who ended up running for Student Body President—and won. Through Mock Trial, he became a kid who learned to question and to look at all sides of an issue before just accepting what he heard.

The Academy's flagship public education program, the Wade Edwards High School Mock Trial Competition, is about much more than mock trials. It is about making good citizens. It is about being a part of the foundation that helps to shape future leaders in our communities. It is about everyone who is touched by this program walking out of the courthouse that day with a better impression of lawyers and our legal system, and a better understanding of the importance and significance of a trial by jury.

Since the inception of the Mock Trial program, we have touched the lives of

thousands of young people across our state. I say “we,” because while it is the Academy that sponsors the program, it is the participation of individual Academy members that makes it successful. From the members who donate a few hours of time to serve as judges or jurors at a local regional competition or State Finals; to the members who coach and advise teams; to the members who run regional competitions and write and edit cases for us each year; to the members who contribute to the financial support of the program at our annual Academy Auction—collectively, we make a difference, and we influence the lives of the young people involved in Mock Trial in positive and powerful ways. The ripple effect of what we do individually and collectively through this program goes well beyond what we ever could have imagined when we undertook it.

In this year of service at the Academy, we are continually seeking out ways for our members to increase their individual vis-

ibility in their respective communities as professionals who give back and are committed to public service. Your participation in the Mock Trial program is one avenue towards contributing to that effort. The same holds true with our individual service to the public, our profession, and our peers. Through our individual and collective efforts, we *will begin* to turn the tide in our favor. We make a difference every day, and together, we have the power to effect change.

It is sometimes hard to envision the change we can make with our individual service efforts. We are all busy and challenged in many ways in our practices and day-to-day commitments. It can be difficult to see the forest for the trees that can consume our view. But in the words of Marian Wright Edelman, founder of the Children's Defense Fund, “We must not, in trying to think about how we can make a big difference, ignore the small daily differences we can make which, over time, add up to big

differences that we often cannot foresee.” Robert Kennedy put it best when he said, “Few will have the greatness to bend history itself; but *each* of us can work to change a small portion of events, and in the *total* of all those acts will be written the history of this generation.”

During his year as president of the Academy, James Ferguson told us, “I believe we can fly.” I agree. I believe we can be the change we want to see in our profession, and I believe we can be the change we must make in public perception. We will not do it overnight, but we can do it over time. The effort that each of us individually puts forth will cause a ripple effect that cannot help but spread, combine, and collectively have an impact and influence beyond what we ever envisioned.

I wish you all a blessed and successful 2007. I look forward to seeing the progress we can make together in this coming year, along with the history we will write. ■

CALENDAR

MARCH

March 14

Legal Ethics for Paralegals (LIVE)
UPDATED PROGRAM! Also available via LIVE WEBCAST!
Academy Headquarters, Raleigh

March 16

Workers' Comp Roundtable (LIVE)
Academy Headquarters, Raleigh

March 16 – NEW DATE!

Meth 101: Defending a Meth Case in North Carolina (LIVE)
Renaissance Hotel, Asheville

March 23

2nd Solo & Small Firm Symposium (LIVE)
Greensboro Downtown Marriott

March 30

Medical Malpractice March Madness: Jumping through All the Hoops (LIVE)
Academy Headquarters, Raleigh

March 30

Eminent Domain Seminar (LIVE)
O'Henry Hotel, Greensboro

March 30

Social Security Practice: The Rules & Regulations Overlooked by Most Specialists (LIVE)
Academy Headquarters, Raleigh

APRIL

April 23

Legal Ethics for Paralegals (VIDEO)
Asheville; Jacksonville; Morehead City

April 27

Employment Law Seminar (LIVE)
Elon University School of Law,
Greensboro Campus

April 27

Liens & Claims Against PI Recoveries (LIVE) Also available via LIVE WEBCAST!
O'Henry Hotel, Greensboro

MAY

May 4

Poverty Law Seminar (LIVE)
Academy Headquarters, Raleigh

May 4

Auto Torts: Tales from the Trenches— from the Academy's Trench Masters (LIVE) Also available via LIVE WEBCAST!
Location TBD

May 11

Structured Settlement Trusts (LIVE)
Academy Headquarters, Raleigh

May 14

Legal Ethics for Paralegals (VIDEO)
Goldsboro; Morganton

May 18

Civil Rights Seminar (LIVE)
Academy Headquarters, Raleigh

May 21

Legal Ethics for Paralegals (VIDEO)
Raleigh; Rocky Mount

JUNE

June 4

Legal Ethics for Paralegals (VIDEO)
Fayetteville; Greenville

June 16

Legal Assistants Summer Conference (LIVE)
Sea Trail Resort, Sunset Beach

June 16

Civil Masters in Advocacy Seminar (LIVE)
Sea Trail Resort, Sunset Beach

June 16

Criminal Masters in Advocacy Seminar (LIVE)
Sea Trail Resort, Sunset Beach

June 17-20

Convention 2007 (LIVE)
Sea Trail Resort, Sunset Beach