



PRESIDENT'S PAGE

ASHLEIGH E. AITKEN

It's Truly a Wonderful Life

One of my favorite holiday movies is *It's a Wonderful Life*. I also love *White Christmas*, but comparing my bar presidency to two soldiers chasing after a pair of sisters/lounge singers to a hotel in Vermont proved more difficult than I first thought.

For the deprived souls who have not had an opportunity (yet) to see *It's a Wonderful Life*, it stars Jimmy Stewart as George, a despairingly frustrated and suicidal businessman who is helped by a guardian angel to see what life would have been like if he had never existed. It sounds like a downer, but I've always been inspired by how George's small acts of kindness have, over time, touched so many lives and collectively contributed to making the town a better place. It is often the little things in life, the ones we fail to appreciate on a daily basis, which end up bringing us the most satisfaction and pleasure in the end.

As I look back on this year, these lessons are profoundly relevant. I do not know if it's because I am an Aitken, or type-A, or just delusional, but I had a laundry list of items I intended to accomplish this year that did not come to fruition. Solve veterans issues by March, increase the diversity numbers in law firms by June, examine the role of modern feminism and address wage inequality by August, and round out the year by involving the bar in the ongoing homeless crisis overtaking the civic center in Santa Ana. While I did not knock as many items off my punch-list as I originally intended, I do want to take a moment to reflect on my year as President, and the collective actions of so many who made a difference in my life and the lives of others over the past twelve months.

My Family. I thought about writing my last column as a letter to Michael, reintroducing myself and telling him what I have been up to for the last twelve months. Alas, I was concerned that it would be too sappy, or I would run afoul of my promise not to objectify him anymore. In all honesty, the sacrifice in time and sleep over the past months is felt more by my loved ones than me. I am so grateful to have a strong and feminist husband who encourages me every moment, and is willing to support, or at least not comment, when I have meetings from 7:00 in the morning until 9:00 at night. Throw on top of that my year as Chairwoman for the Orange County Fair Board, a move into a new home, a puppy, and, oh yeah, my legal career, and I am just happy he returns my texts. I also want to thank my girls for attempting to understand why I have missed so many drop-offs, pick-ups, or good night stories. Girls: I promise to read "Who is in the Loo?" as many times as you need next year.

I also want to thank my extended firm family. I could not have been OCBA President without the continuous support and encouragement of my Aitken*Aitken*Cohn family. My assistant, Joanna, did not quit amidst trying to organize my calendar, and my siblings and co-workers only gave me a slightly hard

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- 1. OCBA President Ashleigh Aitken (Aitken Aitken Cohn LLP), Violet Aitken-Penn, Michael Penn (Aitken Aitken Cohn LLP), Simone Aitken-Penn, and Colette Aitken-Penn
- 2. OCBA President Ashleigh Aitken (Aitken Aitken Cohn LLP) and Hon. Lon Hurwitz (Lamoreaux Justice Center)
- 3. Christopher, Ashleigh, Bette, and Darren Aitken (Aitken Aitken Cohn LLP)
- 4. The celebration continues at Judges' Night 2015

time about the amount of time out of the office. I could not ask for a better place to work, or more devoted lawyers to call as colleagues.

Veterans and Military Task Force. I am amazed at what the Veterans and Military Task Force has been able to accomplish. In just under a year, the task force put on four MCLE trainings on how to help veterans with *pro bono* legal services, launched an interactive website to assist lawyers and veterans in finding existing resources, and volunteered in the community at the Stand Down for Veterans event. Under the stewardship of Dwight Stirling, the task force was able to not only bring together the stakeholders that serve the veteran community, but also OCBA member veterans, law students in veteran clinics, and representatives from the District Attorney's office and the Office of the Public Defender. The OCBA Board recently voted to establish a standing Veterans & Military Committee, which will continue to give OCBA members an outlet to give back to our ever-growing veteran community. To see the effect of all of our hard work is my proudest accomplishment this year.

The OCBA Staff. Due to the amazing staff at the OCBA, there is only so much damage I could wreck on the organization in one year. I am truly thankful to everyone who serves this organization on a day-to-day basis, and want to acknowledge the excellent team that our executive director, Trudy Levindofske, has assembled. It must not be easy dealing with a president's changing face every year, especially when each president comes in with new, or sometimes the same, ideas for change. Trudy and her right hand Michelle O'Campo handle it all with grace. Thank you also to the editor of *OC Lawyer*, Gialisa Gaffaney, for editing my ever-truant articles, Andrew Hart for the amazing layouts, and Dennis Slaughter for building the veterans a stellar website.

The Board of Directors. I sometimes asked a lot of our Board, whether it be to step out on a limb and tackle judicial independence, start the conversation on racial diversity in law firms, or show up at events after a long day at work. I have had the pleasure of serving with an amazing board, and have learned so much from each member. Even when a decision is not unanimous, the OCBA Board's ability to debate with respect and listen to others is a true testament to proper governance. If only Congress were so lucky! I want to especially acknowledge the Executive Committee, and wish Todd Friedland a successful year. It is nice to know the bar will be in such capable hands in the upcoming years.

The Members. I would not be where I am today if not for the ongoing support of our OCBA members and the leadership of our section and committee chairs. Thank you for all your emails of support, the new ideas and suggestions, laughing at my terrible jokes, and encouraging me along my journey. I may not have accomplished everything I set out to do, but I look back fondly on the new friends I have made and appreciate all the people that collectively work so hard to make this organization great. It has truly been wonderful to serve you as President.

For the six people who are still reading this, and who didn't quit reading my blather in February, you are my favorite members. Just don't tell the other 9,000 members I said so.



*Ashleigh E. Aitken is Of Counsel at Aitken*Aitken*Cohn, a position she obtained neither through nepotism nor duress. She is a plaintiff-only civil litigation attorney specializing in wrongful death, personal injury, business torts, and class actions. She can be reached at ashleigh@aitkenlaw.com.*

1. Richard Cohn, Ashleigh Aitken, and Wylie Aitken (Aitken Aitken Cohn) with Dennis Rosene (State Farm) at the OCBA Charitable Fund 31st Annual Judge Kenneth Lae Charity Golf Tournament

2. Bryan Fazio (Whittier Law School), Major Dwight Stirling (Veterans Legal Institute), OCBA President Ashleigh Aitken (Aitken Aitken Cohn LLP), and Antoinette Balta (Veterans Legal Institute)

3. Sheila-Marie Finkelstein (Holstrom, Block & Parke APLC), OCBA President Ashleigh Aitken (Aitken Aitken Cohn LLP), and Board member Rebecca Callahan at the 5th Annual Orange County Stand Down & Veterans Resource Expo

4. Michael Penn (Aitken Aitken Cohn LLP), OCBA President Ashleigh Aitken (Aitken Aitken Cohn LLP), Board member Larisa Dinsmoor (Orange County Public Defender), Secretary Nikki Miliband (Good Wildman), and Young Lawyers Division Chair Jesse Bolling (Greenberg Gross LLP) at the OCBA Charitable Fund's 3rd Annual Raise Your Glass Wine Tasting & Charity Awards Benefit

