



Al Brayton (2006-2007)

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Ingrid Evans: Can you please identify yourself, your law firm, and how you got involved in Public Justice and what years?

Al Brayton: I’m Al Brayton. My law firm is Brayton Purcell, located in Northern California. I started in Public Justice in the early 1990s.

Ingrid: What years did you serve on the board for public justice and as president of Public Justice?

Al: I was on board from very early on, and I was president from 2006 to 2007 and I’ve continued to participate on the board since that time. I was the last president of Trial Lawyers for Public Justice and the first for the Public Justice Foundation.

That was a time period with a great deal of controversy over the change. The impetus behind it at the time was push back against trial lawyers and trying to reach out more to the entire public interest community so we could be the litigation arm for their trial lawyers.

Ingrid: Why did you join Public Justice initially?

AI: I joined because Fred Baron approached me and said, "AI, this is something that you need to do." I attended a meeting and I was taken in by the description Arthur Bryant gave of what makes a Public Justice case. He said, "You look at it and you say, 'that's a goddamn outrage.'" I thought they were filling a purpose that needed to be filled.

Ingrid: Did you feel that you needed to do something and help the organization?

AI: I thought they were meaningful cases, and to the extent they were usually cases that nobody would take because there was no profit involved in doing it and that the work needed to be done.

Ingrid:

Were there any particular cases that really stood out to you as being exceptional?

AI: I think Brown University was a particularly important case. There have been so many cases over the years, I don't think I've ever seen anything that I didn't think were worthwhile. And if anything, I wish we could do more. And that was part of my efforts in trying to build the organization, was so that we would have more resources and be able to handle more of the cases.

Ingrid: And you really did an excellent job building Public Justice. From my memory, you really helped solidify its finances and you became very involved.

AI: I'm not sure that I did anything more than other people did. I focused on trying to build membership and I tried to make sure that we were disciplined in our budgeting and sustainable as we went forward.

Ingrid: Whenever I went to membership drives -- that was something that I always thought was amazing that you did and brought in young lawyers like myself at the time and got us so that we became involved in Public Justice. So thank you for all of that. What was your primary concern at the beginning of your presidency?

AI: It was to continue to work on the financial stability because we had some tough years. And to not only build membership, but to try and find a way to maintain the members so they didn't trickle off and build the base. What's important is getting the dedicated members who will work, who will help us find cases and work on the cases that is appropriate. And reach out to others and get them enthusiastically involved in the organization.

Ingrid: How has the organization changed from the time you initially joined to now?

AI: Well, I think I think we're financially more secure than we were at any time when I was really actively involved. I think we still need to do more on the membership. I thought our work on guns was very, very important. And I think all of those areas could use even more of our attention.

Ingrid: One of the key events that Public Justice has every year is the Trial Lawyer of the Year event. Are you inspired when you hear about those cases?

AI: Always. And one of the toughest things I do every year sitting in the Case Evaluation Committee is going through the list. And it's almost impossible to figure out who is the best in doing that because there are just so many meaningful results. But they're all inspiring.

Ingrid: I don't think I've ever come out of that dinner without some wet eyes and being truly inspired and hopeful for just all the work we do through Public Justice.

AI: You should really take a look sometime at the total -- go through Case Valuation Committee and read 20 or 25 summaries because as inspiring as the eventual nominees are, that is just an incredible breadth of good work being done out there.

Ingrid: One of the things that I really love about Public Justice, too, is it truly feels like a family. Can you talk about that?

AI: I think initially that's kind of what drew me to the organization. There was a lot collegiality, very little competitiveness, always the willingness to help everybody else and being totally dedicated to the organization.

Ingrid: You brought a lot of people into the organization. Can you talk about that a little bit?

AI: Well, I think it's an easy organization to love. The people are great. I just can't say enough good things. And, you know, you were such a great choice to bring along.

Ingrid: Thank you. What do you think of Public Justice now?

AI: I think it's incredibly important. And I think we're doing wonderful work in so many different areas.

Pamela/Public Justice: I was wondering if you might be able to share a little bit more about what kind of outreach we can be doing to increase membership.

AI: You know, one of the things that the I have done over the years was support a public interest fellowship. I thought it was important to try and catch people when they're visionary. So I think we should continue our efforts to court young lawyers and law students -- to support them, to inspire them and get them involved.

I think most of what I did was built on personal relationships and trying to get people as enthusiastic as I was about the organization. You know, nothing beats personal outreach. Look at the people they deal with on a continuing basis and if they're not a member of your organization, reach out and bring them on board.

I think we've had a great team of leaders over the years and some I'm particularly close with.

Ingrid: Did those hard times cause you to kind of rise to the challenge and decide that you wanted to help make changes, to really create a solid foundation and make sure that Public Justice was financially doing well in the future? Because I really credit you as being the person that was instrumental for doing that. That was my take away.

AI: I think it pointed out the importance of having that sustainable base as you went forward.

Ingrid: Did you work as a group of people on doing strategic planning?

AI: You had to be involved in planning --- always a big job -- and hopefully built a lot of the framework that allowed us to go where we've gone. It's still important as we move forward. You can't abandon that. And then you've also got to measure yourself against that plan. You can't just make the plan. You should be going back every year and set goals and objectives and see how you've done against that. Modify, if necessary, but make it a living document and something that you work with.

Ingrid: Thank you for everything you've done for Public Justice.