

17th Annual San Francisco Trial Lawyers Association Trial Lawyer of the Year Gala

April 7, 2016

Many thanks to the SFTLA Board for this award! I am thrilled and honored. I have to acknowledge the support and inspiration I have received from SFTLA over the years.

I am happy to have with me tonight friends, colleagues, my wife Margaret Coyne and my daughter Alanna, and my brother Bill and sister Valerie and their spouses. We lost our brother Edward last year, and I'm glad to be able to be here together tonight to celebrate something good from 2015.

Being a trial lawyer is very satisfying. Make a good living, have fun, and meet a lot of challenges. This award – this recognition is icing on the cake.

I chose law when as a freshman in college I realized a future in the theater wasn't likely to work out. I followed my brother Bill's footsteps into law. I wanted to be a criminal trial lawyer – a public defender.

When that didn't happen, I chose personal injury. Civil justice is a little harder to articulate than criminal law. Essentially, trial is the ultimate ADR [alternative dispute resolution]- taking it off the streets and into the courtroom.

We contingency fee lawyers open the courthouse doors to our clients who otherwise couldn't pay to play. We give our clients a voice and a chance for justice, against big money – big business – big insurance.

I pursued this real estate agent injury case for more than 5 years and an appeal to get our day in court. By the time we got there my clients were tired of being bullied by the defense. They told the judge – we don't want to negotiate! We want a trial. And that's what we did. [Jury trial in Contra Costa ending in a \$525,000 verdict and judgment.]

The other case I tried in 2015 didn't work out as well – we lost. Here in San Francisco the settlement officer was adamant – “convince your client to settle.” And I agreed and did recommend the six-figure settlement offer to my client.

When I told the court my client didn't accept the settlement offer, I had to add, “she hired me to be her lawyer, her trial lawyer, and that's what I'll do.”

And that's what I'll continue to do

Thank you.