

ASSOCIATION OF BUSINESS TRIAL LAWYERS

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REPORT

LOS ANGELES

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



Manuel Cachán

It has been more than half a year since the last President's Message appeared in these pages, although you would be forgiven for thinking more time had passed. One COVID variant has been followed by another and still another. Masks have stayed on, come off, come back on, and then fallen off again. "Booster," "N-95," "viral load," and "positivity rate" are some of the obscure words and phrases we were forced to learn by dint of necessity. We have seen colleagues and friends fall ill, some seriously and worse. Perhaps we have even been sick ourselves.

I spent the better part of what we now call "Lockdown" out of Los Angeles, in a cramped one-bedroom apartment in lower Manhattan. Ambulance sirens were heard at all hours as the

city reached its apogee of illness in the early months of the pandemic. Hospital emergency rooms were at capacity, filled with the sick and dying. New York Governor Cuomo had not yet fallen from grace, and his daily press conferences passed in the moment for both comfort and entertainment. None of us yet knew exactly where the danger lay. We still washed our groceries, just in case. The famously crowded streets of New York were crowded no longer, empty of pedestrians, cabs, and Ubers. Every evening at 7, just as dusk settled in, neighbors banged pots and pans at their open windows as a way of thanking hospital workers—since a simple hand shake was now out of bounds—and, indirectly, to be reminded of each other's existence. Once every few days, I would leave the house for supplies, always during the week to avoid crowds. My interactions with other human beings were limited: one person to speak with on most days, three on a special occasion. One Friday afternoon, I sat in a park with friends, six feet apart, drinking take-out spicy margaritas, seemingly the only good thing the pandemic had brought us. Even in the panic of the first few weeks, when the courts closed, no reopening date was dreamed of, and it seemed we might all be out of work soon, we thought more about the people who mattered to us and less about work than we had in years.

For an organization like ours whose central purpose is to manufacture conviviality, allowing legal adversaries to have fun with one another and thereby recognize each other's basic humanity, this is properly a year of celebration at our cautious rebirth. 2022 is when we will, one hopes finally or at least for the foreseeable future, see one another again in person (taking of course all due precautions), celebrate in person, debate in person, and shake hands again, if that custom hasn't gone forever out of style.

The ABTL, fundamentally a social organization, was made for a year like this when, to rob a phrase, it feels like if not the beginning of the end of COVID, then at least the end of the beginning. I am lucky to have 2022 as my opportunity to serve as your President. I encourage each of you to take advantage of the many opportunities ABTL gives us to come together, from our dinners to the Annual Retreat, after so long apart. Joke, laugh, converse, argue. We are blessed to have one another.

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