

## **Mentor as...Motivator**

*By Dwight F. Ritter, Master*

When I was much younger lawyer, many, many years ago, I was looking for all the mentors I could find. I had a fair amount of jury experience for my age and lots of energy but I was looking for someone who truly understood jury trials, how to present them, how to handle them, and how to keep motivated through the obstacles. While there were many lawyers who would give free advice, it wasn't always accurate or worthwhile. In fact, in many instances the advice was wrong. It was not given with bad intent; lawyers simply didn't know what they were talking about but thought that they did.

But there was one person in the late 70's and early 80's that was generating a lot of motivation, and personal success. He was very open about his work and would write books about his cases. He was fearless in his presentation and zeal. He would often accept cases that appeared to be unwinnable, and yet he would win. His work was best represented by the books he wrote and the seminars he presented. His name is Gerry Spence.

In essence, I read and reread every book he wrote and listened to every seminar. His enthusiasm was truly an inspiration and his philosophy began to significantly influence my work. As I tried more and more juries, both civil and criminal I was able to incorporate much of his approach and feelings about helping persons who could not help themselves. Then in the mid-80s while I was studying for my LL M. degree at the London School of Economics, I had to choose an evidence dissertation about a controversial case that could be studied using a method called Wigmorean analysis. I focused the project on Gerry Spence's Karen Silkwood case. As you may recall, this was a very controversial case about Kerr-McGee's negligent exposure of its employees to nuclear fuel and the subsequent multimillion dollar verdict against Kerr-McGee in favor of the Silkwood family. After completing the project, I forwarded a copy of the dissertation to Spence and we corresponded about the limitations and advantages of using Wigmorean analysis. Since that time many years ago, we have discussed other methods for discovering and analyzing a story that are much more useful than Wigmorean analysis. Again, he knows a better way.

Spence's most significant contribution, in my view, is his incredible insight and appreciation for juries and how juries make decisions. Since the 1960's, he has studied juries with great intensity and researched the scientific background to identify and confirm the process we often refer to as "trial lawyer's intuition". Spence is unlike most successful trial lawyers, who believe only they possess the talents and thus are not particularly interested in sharing with others. He firmly believes his talents and trial abilities can be taught. Even though his methods are not traditional, Gerry Spence has shared and continues to share his insights. He is the kind of mentor you want.

As I look at the huge wealth of trial lawyers across our country, I cannot think of a single person who has had more influence, or more enthusiasm in representing people who are easily squashed by the sheer weight of our judicial system. To this day, at the age of 82, Spence continues to actively teach, and share his skills and knowledge. He says his greatest regret is that he cannot do more to help those who most need representation. I believe him. His life work reflects that attitude. I once asked Gerry Spence who was his mentor and he said he had none. I'm proud to say, like many others, he has been my most influential mentor. I'm just glad I've had an opportunity to tell him.