



Future lawyer of America.

## Talk Story

BY JOI KUSH

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“We are all storytellers. We all live in a network of stories. There isn’t a stronger connection between people than storytelling.”

—Jimmy Neil Smith, founder and past president emeritus of the International Storytelling Center

**A**s I casually but confidently entered the dimly lit auditorium, I was immediately hit with the smell of expensive perfume, newly polished

shoes, and spray-on starch. I looked around at the massive gathering with excitement and accomplishment. Despite the monotone sea of greys, beiges, and blues, I felt invigorated and inspired. My heart was whole, and butterflies swarmed my stomach. With my right hand raised, I cautiously and deliberately uttered the sacred oath.

I do solemnly swear and affirm that: I will support the Constitution of the United States and the Constitution of the State of

Colorado; I will maintain the respect due to Court and judicial officers; I will employ only such means as are consistent with trust and honor; I will treat all persons whom I encounter through my practice of law with fairness, courtesy, respect and honesty; I will use my knowledge of the law for the betterment of society and the improvement of the legal system; I will never reject, from any consideration personal to myself, the cause of the defenseless or oppressed; I will at all times faithfully and diligently adhere to the Colorado Rules of Professional Conduct.

Each word dropped heavily on my tongue, and the gravity of the event became real. In three short minutes (give or take), I became an attorney.

### Tales of a Fourth-Grade (Would-Be) Lawyer

My journey to the bar began in fourth grade. My parents had taught me that service to others, especially to those in need, was the truest measure of success, and I knew that attorneys were fierce advocates to those in need. My knowledge of the law and the legal profession was nonexistent, but I knew what I wanted to become, at least in title. Yet so many in my life told me that becoming a lawyer was something I could never achieve.

I spent a decade and then some working and studying to prove them wrong. Some would say that working as a care provider, hospitality worker, and food and beverage specialist (a.k.a. restaurant manager) was not the best preparation for law school or life as an attorney. But each hard, humbling, fast-paced, and sometimes degrading job furthered my path to becoming a professional in the most honorable of professions.

There were occasions when I thought I wanted something else, and there were days when I felt inadequate to join the bar. On my first day of law school, I cried. I felt overwhelmed because each new classmate's accolades, accomplishments, and achievements seemed so much greater than my own. I learned for the first time that, after I completed three grueling years of school, I had to take (and pay for) a two-day test called the bar exam; honestly, I had never heard of it before. The American Bar Association, in all its wisdom, prohibited first-year law students from working at all. That was not consistent with my reality, so I worked, studied, and lived. I wasn't going to let anyone or anything prevent me from becoming an attorney.

I did not graduate at the top of my class, and there was no job waiting for me when I graduated. However, during my time in law school, I worked and studied in China, Japan, Thailand, and Vietnam. I interned at the Albany County District Attorney's Office, with Justice Littlefield of the US Bankruptcy Court, and Albany Law School's Civil Rights and Disabilities Law Clinic. I edited two law journals and held a few leadership positions. I took out a mortgage on my brain, and in the end, I took four bar exams (Colorado, New York, and California, twice). Through persistence, anxiety, and substantial support, I became a licensed lawyer in Colorado, New York, and California.

I still struggle every day. I fail often. But service to others remains my guiding star, and I choose to smile and laugh every day. I am an active, imperfect litigator who owns a small business, is dedicated to the practice of law, and loves life. This is my story.

### **Building Connection through Story**

Storytelling is as old as humankind, perhaps older. Cave drawings can be traced back to over

30,000 years ago and are our first true evidence of stories. We have been telling, repeating, drawing, and writing our stories for millennia. We have told each other who we are and where we came from. We have shared knowledge essential to our survival, and we have explained the unexplainable (at least a little). But, most importantly, we have created connections and communities through our shared stories.



Zooming through the streets of Vietnam.

**We all have a story to tell, and now, more than ever, is the time to share it with others. Whether you're at a CLE, networking event, leadership meeting, local bar visit, or some other law-related affair, engage—talk story.**

As social creatures, we crave these connections formed through mutual understanding, empathy, and experience. Each story invokes a variety of emotions and bodily reactions. When we actively listen to a story, we experience life with the storyteller. We see the world through the

speaker's lens. We feel the speaker's emotions and are transported to the moment the speaker is describing; every smell, sound, and sight becomes alive. We connect with the speaker, and in a magical moment there is separation from reality, we become the storyteller, and the story is our own.

We cannot exist without stories. Without the context of our individual and collective experiences, the world would be a brutal and chaotic space. Our brains process everything we see, hear, smell, touch, and taste through the story we have already lived, and everything we do becomes part of our story. Our lives are a "choose your own adventure" until the very last page.

### **A Year of Engagement**

We all crave meaningful connections and engagement after a tumultuous year of isolation, fear, and "the unknown." We can create these connections and engagement through stories. We all have a story to tell, and now, more than ever, is the time to share it with others. Whether you're at a CLE, networking event, leadership meeting, local bar visit, or some other law-related affair, *engage*—talk story.

Throughout my term, I look forward to sharing stories from CBA members throughout Colorado. In October, pro bono lawyers will inspire service. November will celebrate *Colorado Lawyer's* 50th year in print. In December we will share the stories of past, current, and aspiring CBA leaders. January will provide readers a glimpse of life as a litigator. February will focus on "Greater Colorado" and life outside of the Denver metro area. In March, readers will learn the secrets of a transactional lawyer. To celebrate the life and backbone of the organization, April will highlight the CBA and CBA staff. May will take most readers back down memory lane, as we hear from our law student members. I will write my final chapter in June. Each month will be a different story and a new journey. This is our book to write.

Remember, life will not wait; one day, we will cease to be, but our stories will continue on. Make your story one to remember.

#WhatsURStory 