

Jackson Legal Team Had 'Once-In-A-Lifetime' Experience

By KAREN ALI

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Several lawyers from the Bridgeport firm of Koskoff, Koskoff & Bieder spent six months in Los Angeles as part of a plaintiffs legal team representing the family of Michael Jackson in a wrongful death lawsuit against the pop star's promoter.

The bad news for the Bridgeport bunch is the high-profile trial resulted in a defense verdict. But on the plus side, Bill Bloss and his colleagues got a full blast of what it's like to live on the left coast.

"The traffic outside downtown was indescribably bad. I will never complain about the drive to Stamford again," said Bloss, who, like his colleagues, helped the Jackson family lawyers with the medical malpractice aspects of the case. On the other hand, "downtown L.A. is starting to become somewhat trendy. There are lots of great ethnic restaurants. The Mexican and South American restaurants were outstanding."

Despite the disappointing result, Michael Koskoff said that "none of us would have missed this opportunity." He and the Jackson family lawyers are reviewing the record now to determine if there will be an appeal.

Jackson's mother and his three children sued Jackson's concert promoter, AEG Live Inc., claiming AEG is responsible for Jackson's 2009 death because the firm hired and supervised Dr. Conrad Murray, who administered the medication that led to Jackson's overdose death. Murray was convicted in 2011 for involuntary manslaughter in connection with the case.

The Jackson family lawyers believe that AEG created a conflict of interest that caused Murray to engage in risky medicine. He was being paid \$150,000 a month to take care of Jackson on what promised to be a lucrative concert tour. If the tour didn't happen, the doctor would not get the money.

But ultimately the jury accepted AEG Live lawyers' arguments that the company was not negligent because its executives had no way of knowing that Murray — licensed to practice in four states and never sued for malpractice — was a risk to Jackson.

The Koskoff firm lawyers spent a great deal of time working on the Jackson case, and juggling their Connecticut caseloads, but they also had some time to explore Los Angeles.

Bloss spent a few days reviewing raw movie footage of Jackson's concert rehearsals at the Sony movie lot in Culver City. "That was interesting in itself, but the studio was right next to a lot where Sony was storing various cars and trucks used in movies and shows," Bloss recalled. "The race car from *Tallegda Nights* was there. So was the Green Hornet's car, and Walter White's RV rolling meth lab from *Breaking Bad*. Sony had no problem with our wandering around and checking them out."

Other impressions of LA? "One thing that surprised me was how many local sites can be recognized from scenes in movies and TV shows," said Bloss. "I went out to a beach in Malibu one weekend, and it looked vaguely familiar — there was an unusual cliff formation right along the beach. It turns out that the iconic closing scene in the original *Planet of the Apes* movie, where Charlton Heston discovers the ruined Statue of Liberty on the beach, was filmed there.

"I also went hiking in a state park outside L.A. that was used to film many of the original *Star Trek* episodes, and I remembered some of the scenes where Kirk was scampering along the rocks, chasing or being chased by something or other."

Koskoff said that except for one long weekend in May, he and his wife were in Los Angeles virtually the whole time.

"For more than six months I lived, ate, and slept the case of Katherine Jackson versus AEG Live. I loved going to court each day," Koskoff said, adding that the courthouse had a great energy surrounding it.

"Two of our children, who are screenwriters, and four grandchildren live there and it was great to spend time with them. The restaurants are diverse and the sushi unsurpassed. We often struck up conversations with fellow diners who were professionals in the movie industry," Koskoff said. "Beautiful people, film stars and would-be film stars, are everywhere. The streets are lined with cafés populated by people with laptops writing screenplays."

Koskoff said that the Stanley Mosk Courthouse, where the case was held, probably has more courtrooms than all of the superior courthouses of Connecticut put together. "I got to know the security people, bailiffs and court personal well. I may add that the security people and court personnel were friendlier than most in Connecticut and reflective of the generally friendly and sunny attitude of Angelinos," Koskoff said.

Another Koskoff lawyer, Alinor Sterling, had sort of a different viewpoint. Asked if she noticed a difference in how the legal community functions in Connecticut and California, she replied: "It's not useful to generalize too much, but I appreciate the high degree of civility in the Connecticut bar, and the expectation that here we still do things on a handshake."

Bloss said he rented an apartment in downtown Los Angeles, within walking distance from

court.

Koskoff commuted a half hour each way from a condo in West Hollywood, to the downtown Los Angeles courthouse.

"I chose to drive on surface roads, rather than the freeways, passing through the hip neighborhoods of Hollywood, the Orthodox Jewish Fairfax area, fashionable Hancock Park, Korea Town, Little El Salvador and Little Mexico," Koskoff said.

Carey Reilly, another Koskoff lawyer, said that she lived in a great condo in the trendy Grove area of Los Angeles. "My daughter came to visit for a week with her boyfriend and about the most exciting thing I did was go to trapeze school on Santa Monica Pier with them," Reilly said. "Other than that, it is sad but true: I just worked and learned how to deal with the L.A. traffic."

The lawyers said that being away from Connecticut for so long was a challenge. Koskoff said he set up "an auxiliary office" in his condo and communicated with the Bridgeport office via Skype.

"The longest I've ever been away before this was one week," Bloss said. "It was a real challenge, but my colleagues here [in Bridgeport] picked up the work that needed to be done, and electronic communication made the rest easier. I can't imagine how much harder it would be in days before email and scanned documents."

Reilly said that the day-to-day business of keeping her Connecticut cases moving was difficult, but she was in constant contact, via phone and email, with the main Koskoff office. "The support staff and other lawyers in the office kept things on track. It was more difficult being away from my family than it was being away from the office," Reilly said. "But it was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity that I would not hesitate to do again. Working on such a high-profile case gave me the chance to meet some of the most extraordinary experts in the fields of anesthesiology, sleep medicine, addiction medicine and cardiology."•