



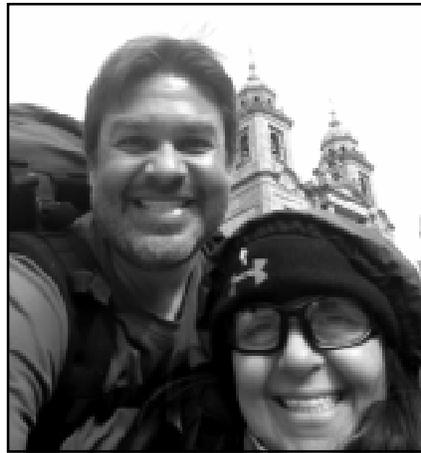
“Adventure of a Lifetime”

Courageous Client Accomplishes in Wheelchair What Few Walking Pilgrims Have Ever Done

(EDITOR’S NOTE: Although a lawyer’s life is not nearly as glorious as often depicted on TV or in movies, it is an honor and a privilege to advocate on behalf of those injured by another’s negligence. One does not win a case or obtain a settlement without genuine desire to help people struggling after suffering from an accident, knowing they will be facing difficult circumstances that they may not foresee. At the Law Firm of Alton C. Todd, we try to be compassionate, while tactfully addressing not only medical issues but a careful and prudent plan for the future. We are gratified and fulfilled when we accomplish that objective and saddened when injured clients, like lottery winners, sometimes experience another tragedy by “blowing the settlement.” The experience of Debra Sutton is a heartwarming exception.)

The company in charge of repairing roads on the east side of Galveston in 1989 had been ticketed multiple times for failing to mark the roads as under construction. There were no signs or barrels. The young couple was traveling home with their six-month-old daughter, when, suddenly, the wheels on the right side of the car slipped off the road. When the driver turned the steering wheel to correct their position, the car flew across to the other side and crashed into a culvert in a ditch on the passenger side.

The front seat passenger was Debra Dees, then 18, who recalls her shock and hearing the baby cry, which was a good thing. Her husband was not injured, but,



James and Debra Sutton

Debra, barely breathing, couldn’t move. A six-month hospitalization followed. The most damaging of her serious injuries was a broken neck. Rendered a quadriplegic, her breathing not assured, she was first on a ventilator then transitioned to a tracheostomy. Weeks consumed with healing and occupational and physical therapy prepared her for her new life in a wheelchair.

Although the years since that accident have not been easy, Debra says, “I am very lucky to be able to live without some form of breathing assistance.” And, looking back, she has come to realize “how fortunate we were; three people were in that car and only one was hurt.” Sadly, the accident created so much stress in the marriage, that within a year, the couple separated. Her divorce attorney, curious about the accident, contacted Alton C. Todd because of his expertise in vehicular personal injury. A subsequent meeting resulted in Alton representing Debra in a lawsuit that took 2-3 years to work its way through the system. In 1992, the case was

settled. Through the years, the Suttons and Alton have maintained a professional relationship and mutual admiration.

In the meantime, adjusting to her dramatically changed life, Debra moved closer to the University of Houston college campus in an effort to find a career to support her daughter, Jessica. There, she met James Sutton in the campus laundry room. They became friends very quickly and have not been separated since. They and Jessica, who James would adopt after he and Debra married in 1998, moved into the Friendswood home where they live today, and since that

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Figures Show Impact Of Texas Supreme Court

Attorney Jeff Todd, in recent research, did a quick rundown of the jury verdicts and arbitration awards wiped away by the Texas Supreme Court in 2014. These are only the cases in which a verdict or arbitration award was up for consideration and exclude other cases decided by the Court, which also have a significant economic impact. He wanted to use real dollars to put the Court’s impact into economic context. What he discovered as the grand total for 2014 was a staggering \$244,492,374.55. And, this is exclusive of interest.

Caveat: the total includes a couple of cases in which the Court of Appeals zeroed the plaintiff out, but the Supreme Court affirmed and made those causes of action (shareholder, oppression, asbestos) more difficult to pursue, so they were included (aggregate of \$19 million).



Debra and James in Leon, outside Hotel Parador de Leon, one of the historic buildings that Spain runs as a luxury hotel. It was the former stronghold and monastery of the Knights Templar, an order charged with protecting pilgrims on their journey. The statue is of a typical medieval pilgrim, weary but grateful for arriving at this safe haven. The arrow and pilgrim shell are the ubiquitous signs that mark the Camino de Santiago so pilgrims won’t get lost, though some do.

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time, James has been his wife's sole caretaker. "The level of love and care that he gives cannot be matched by anyone," Debra says. "In fact, my longevity and great health can be attributed to two men, each in his own way: Alton C. Todd, and my husband, who has literally saved my life a handful of times."

The Suttons' lifestyle is non-structured. After their daughter and number one priority graduated and moved away, they became frequent travelers. Having driven extensively throughout the United States and cruising in the Caribbean, they decided they wanted to see other parts of the world before travel became harder with age. As tourists, they learned early on to be independent and to move faster than most people. In 2009, they traveled to Europe for a month, flying to London and taking a train to Paris and Amsterdam. Upon returning, they rented a car for three weeks and drove throughout England, Scotland, Ireland and Wales. A 2012 pilgrimage to Santiago De Compostela was delayed for two years when an accident totaled their car, destroying Debra's customized wheelchair. In late August 2014, they set out on an adventure that would last until early November. Challenging themselves to complete a journey that only a few would ever accomplish, they walked from Lourdes, France to Santiago De Compostela, Spain, a distance of 856 kilometers or 531 miles.

As Catholics, Debra and James were interested in going to Lourdes, home of a tradition of miracles for those with physical health problems and attributed to the holy water that comes from a natural spring. From Lourdes, they walked to St. Jean. It took another seven weeks to walk across Spain. Over mountains and through "deserts," (think southwest Texas), into big cities and small villages, they made their way, ultimately into Santiago de Compostela, James carrying everything in a backpack that weighed 50 lbs at the outset and 35 at the end of their "hike." Many tourist pilgrims have their luggage transported ahead of them to where they are stopping for the night, but Debra says, "We could not risk sending medical supplies ahead and having our luggage lost."

The Suttons are two of millions of people who have made the pilgrimage to Santiago for over a thousand years. In order to receive the Compostela

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One of the many holy sites the Suttons' path would cross. A day of walking uphill in the sun and another two hours to descend the hill would take them to Ponferrada, their evening destination.

"The Heart and Lungs of Liberty" Weakened by Limits on Jury Trials

Each February on President's Day, we honor our nation's Founders whose shared convictions emphasized the importance of our Right to Trial by Jury officially protected by Amendment 7 of the United States constitution. "There was not a member of the Constitutional Convention," George Washington said "who had the least objection to what is contended for by the advocates for a Bill of Rights and trial by jury."

Our second president, John Adams, strongly affirmed representative government and trial by jury as "the heart and lungs of liberty. Without them, we have no other fortification against being ridden by horses, fleeced like sheep, worked like cattle, and fed and clothed like swine and hounds."

"I consider trial by jury as the only anchor ever yet imagined by man, by which a government can be held to the principles of its constitution," stated Thomas Jefferson. His successor, James Madison, fourth president and father of the Constitution, called trial by jury in civil cases "as essential to secure the liberty of the people as any one of the pre-existent rights of nature."

The right to trial by jury was central to the founders of Texas and is reflected in our state's Constitution, Article 1, Section 13-15: "All courts shall be open, and every person, for an injury done him, in his lands, goods, person, or reputation, shall have remedy by due course of law. The right to trial by jury shall remain inviolate."

The 7th Amendment was ratified in 1792. If the framers of our Constitution were alive today, 223 years later, they would surely be appalled at the unprecedented challenges to that inalienable right in which they so firmly believed. Recognizing the growing threats to the jury system, U.S. Supreme Court Justice William Rehnquist wrote in a 1979 case: "Those who oppose the use of juries in civil

trials seem to ignore that the founders of our Nation considered the right of trial by jury in civil cases an important bulwark against tyranny and corruption, a safeguard too precious to be left to the whim of the sovereign, or, it might be added, to that of the judiciary."

How are jury trials consistently being limited, ignored or endangered? The ways are easily counted:

- Caps on damages to injured victims who won their cases, applying a "one-size-fits-all" approach, ignoring evidence that a jury sees
- Caps on contingency fees, making it virtually impossible for attorneys to take cases or for injured people to access legal counsel
- Judges' granting of summary judgments before the party even gets to present a case and the cost of an appeal too great to attempt to reverse the decision
- Lobbyists' push for injured persons who lose a case to pay the defendant's (often corporations') legal bills
- Preemption of state "tort" laws, inserted into federal bills, preventing the wrongly injured from filing legal suits
- Pressure to resolve disputes outside the courts with no juries allowed
- Forced arbitration clauses in contracts between corporations and individuals
- Health courts which would abolish juries in all medical malpractice cases

The conclusion of Joanne Doroshov, Center for Justice and Democracy at New York Law School, writing in *The Huffington Post* on January 22 regarding the embattled civil justice system is indisputable: "History is clear that once an area of law is removed from the civil justice system, it is immediately and forever vulnerable to manipulation by political forces—the very problem the 7th amendment was supposed to prevent."

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(certificate) and the indulgences, tourists must declare they are conducting the pilgrimage as a matter of faith. Many do it just for the travel experience. In the last century, the Catholic church set the standard for receiving the Compostela and the blessings and indulgences it conveys to pilgrims having walked the last 100 kilometers, or if by horseback or bicycle, the last 200 kilometers. The many statistics on those who have completed the pilgrimage are categorized by nationality, means of travel and distance. Wheelchair travelers, most of them paraplegics on specialized three-wheel bikes with gears, constitute fewer than 1 percent of those completing the pilgrimage, almost all walking only the last 100 kilometers. "We know of only one other person in a wheelchair who was solely pushed and at times hooked to teams of people," the Suttons say. James' only helpers were those "amazing and wonderful people" they met along the way who offered to push Debra for a time.

Reflecting on their life when not traveling, Debra says that it's "pretty good right now." Their shared interests include reading, watching movies, and playing games, and they appreciate art in all forms. Both went back to college after Jessica left home, and James completed his degree while she is "still working on her 40-year degree." While Debra says that James is very strong and the handicap has posed few problems in traveling or everyday life, her husband considers another vital dimension: "Debra, he says, "has never given herself enough credit for her mental/physical toughness and her sheer will to live. The pain and suffering she has endured, especially during ICU and rehab is unbelievable. I do not think I could do it."

Although both agree that "it's been a wonderful life," that is not synonymous with ideal or perfect. While unencumbered by such routines as job obligations and mortgage payments, they acknowledge the ease of getting into a rut. Understanding that interaction can be hard for friends and family, they don't see them as much as they would like. James has developed knee problems and back, hip and shoulder pain, especially on the left side, the side on which he carries Debra, but, considering the total picture, after 22 years, Debra says, "James and I are still best friends and in love," and they really never argue, except maybe about what color paint to put on a wall.

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LUCILLE TODD CELEBRATES 95TH BIRTHDAY

Born on January 22, 1920 at a farm home in Hollis, OK, Lucille Harris Todd, mother of Teresa, Dennis and Alton C. Todd, moved, as a child, with her family to West Texas via a covered wagon.

Nearing her 95th birthday celebration in Friendswood on January 22, Lucille recalled growing up in the depression years, but "we really did not know we were in a depression. No one had much money," she said. Lucille and her sisters, Nola, 100, now living in Dallas, and Winnie, 90, in Tulsa, were accustomed, during revivals, to going to church twice a day with their strong Christian mother. Each had her chores, and one day, Lucille, while chopping weeds in the cotton field, put down her hoe, and thinking about the services she had listened to so carefully, made a firm, lifelong decision then and there. "I don't have to be in church to do this," she told her mother, who wanted her 12-year-old daughter to be sure she understood, but Lucille was committed: "I want to take my stand," she vowed, "I accept Jesus as my savior."

The granddaughter of a Civil War veteran, Lucille credits the love of her parents and her Christian upbringing among her greatest blessings. She would bring those learned values to her own home when she married Ruel Todd on June 25, 1938. She was 18, and he was 21. The newlyweds moved to Dallas where Ruel worked as a street car driver, earning \$115 a month. Lucille had completed a business correspondence course and had gotten a job to work for a lawyer, but World War II had started, and Ruel enlisted in the Air Force. She and their 4-year old son, Dennis, would go with him.

Later, the Todds moved to Hamilton, TX, where, for 45 years, they lived on a farm six miles from the city. It was in Hamilton that their children grew up and graduated high school. Lucille and Ruel would have 71 years together until his death on May 27, 2009, 10 days short of his 90th birthday. She defines their marriage as her "greatest honor."

Today, living in The Terrace in Webster, TX, not so far from her son Alton and family, Lucille, mother of three, and grandmother to 11, + 11 great grandchildren, says "I wouldn't trade my life and family I have with



Lucille Todd happily displays a very special birthday card created by her grandsons Shadix and Haden.

anyone." She remembers that her husband used to say, "We are rich. We may have some money someday." And, she was and is rich, blessed with beautiful memories of a life well lived, a resilient and cheerful model of the enduring virtues of faith, hope and love.

THE ATLAW™

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Kai Todd Leads Team In Winning Mars Rover Contest

Kai Todd, 10, son of Rhonda Davis and Mike Todd, and grandson of Alton C. Todd, was the team leader in constructing a winning entry in the Mars Rover Contest held at the University of Houston main campus on January 31. Kai, a 5th grader at Bales Intermediate School in Friendswood, and his team won 2nd place in the Freeform division with their non-moving rover. Thrilled to receive this recognition, Kai exclaimed, “I can’t believe all of my hard work has finally paid off!”

As part of a 6-week classroom learning project on Mars, students designed and constructed models of a Mars Rover to carry out a specific science mission on the surface of Mars. Students were given design criteria for a rover and were required to complete research on Mars to determine operational objectives and structural features of their rover. The models were constructed at a

minimal cost, using found objects, discarded household items and simple art supplies. The rover needed to be small enough to fit into an ordinary grocery bag.

The rover teams created blackboards reflecting the steps they took, pictures from Mars that applied to their mission and their design system approach. Teams had to write a script and present their creative ideas and mission to a panel of judges.

Participation in the finals was limited to the best three teams of four students from each classroom. The contest, sponsored by NASA, was open to all elementary and junior high schools throughout the greater Houston metroplex.

On the way home from the event, his mother asked if he might be interested in pursuing a STEM education so that he could

one day work for NASA. After explaining that STEM stood for Science, Technology, Engineering and Math, Kai replied, “I don’t



Kai Todd With Mars Rover Winning Design

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Following the “adventure of a lifetime,” the Suttons are now looking into going around the world by the Trans-Siberian Express Train (Russia) and steamer ship (Indonesia/Pacific/Atlantic). Every three or four years they plan a big adventure with small sojourns in between. They do not take for granted the opportunity for world travel: “We are lucky to be financially secure, as most people with disabilities are not as fortunate.” Most immediate and exciting on their agenda is a visit to Florida to see their daughter Jessica, her husband and three sons, and to welcome the arrival of their first granddaughter in April.

see how STEM will benefit me in the fields of Oil and Gas or Real Estate Investment.” Clearly, his goal of growing up to be just like his dad has not changed!

ALtruism
Life is 10 percent of what happens to us and 90 percent of how we react.

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