



The Spence Law Firm

[By Aundi Howerton]

Among the writings of the founder of The Spence Law Firm, Gerry Spence, are the words “To survive, we must set aside the religion of corporate omnipotence and tell the truth for once,” and this largely sums up the man’s theory on the practice and teaching of law.

Born in Wyoming—the seat of his law firm and one of several states in which he practices—Spence graduated from the University of Wyoming in 1949 and completed law school at the same university in 1952. His early successes as a prosecutor and big-business defender offered both the mind fodder and material resources he would need to ultimately fulfill a greater vision. Spence writes, [T]he warriors for the people are trial lawyers.” And, indeed, the title of “the people’s warrior” is Spence’s banner after almost half a century of practice.

His goal is to represent the common citizen, especially the one with limited resources who may be suffering at the hands of big business or government. Spence, the author of 15 books on the art of the law soldier and related topics and a self-proclaimed poet and photographer, is equal parts adamant and eloquent regarding his mission and insists, despite his firm’s high-profile status, that “affordability” is no concern. “If we do not win a monetary award for clients, we charge nothing for our services,” he said.

Spence first gained notoriety with a \$10.5 million verdict against Kerr-McGee on behalf

of the father and children of plutonium-contaminated employee and American labor union activist Karen Silkwood after she mysteriously died in a car accident. He earned similar high-profile recognition with big-dollar verdicts against Penthouse for Miss Wyoming and against the McDonald’s Corporation for an oral breach of contract with a small, independently owned ice-cream company. He later defended Randy Weaver in a criminal case in which Weaver and another man were acquitted of murder charges in the self-defense shooting of a U.S. Marshall in Northern Idaho. Spence followed this up with a successful civil suit against government agencies for the deaths of Weaver’s wife and son.

To supplement his self-proclaimed battle for the “justice of the ordinary man,” Spence and his firm’s partners created the nonprofit L.A.W. organization to “provide quality legal representation in defense and promotion of the public’s interest on substantive issues of health, safety, consumer rights, and civil liberties to Wyoming citizens as well as other individuals who are unable to secure a lawyer due to the nature of the controversy or financial inability.”

The organization was formed in 1991 and continues to serve the public interest of Wyoming and several other western states. Spence has also structured a curriculum out of his vision and heads the Trial Lawyers College, dedicated to training and educating lawyers and judges who are also invested in protecting the individual from powerful social machines. Spence’s quarterly journal, *The WARRIOR*, is a similarly intentioned publication for judicial practitioners.

ON THE NET

The Spence Law Firm
www.spencelawyers.com/index.html

Gerry Spence
www.gerryspence.com/index2.html

The Karen Silkwood Story
www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/reaction/interact/silkwood.html