

The attorneys featured in *Rising Stars* for 2008 were selected from the results of an extensive nomination and polling process and through independent research conducted by Law & Politics and published in the July 2008 issue of *Southern California Super Lawyers – Rising Stars Edition* and a special advertising section in the July 2008 issue of *Los Angeles* magazine. Among the best in their profession, *Rising Stars* are limited to 2.5% of the outstanding emerging lawyers in Southern California who are age 40 and under, or have been practicing 10 years or less.

Khomeini Arrives, the Dayzads Leave

by JAMES WALSH photography by LARRY MARCUS

In February 1979, the Islamic Revolution engulfed Iran. Navid Dayzad's father was an engineer and business executive in Tehran. As a religious minority, he knew he had to move quickly to save his wife and children from certain danger, as young Islamic radicals overthrew the secular government of the Shah. By April 16, the family was in the United States.

Everyone, that is, but Dayzad's father. He sent his wife, his daughter and 4-year-old son ahead but he stayed behind, losing his chance to leave the country. It would take another six years for Dayzad's father to make his way out of Iran and reunite with his loved ones.

"My entire grade school years ... there was a lot of missing my dad," says Dayzad, 33.

He majored in psychology at UCLA, but had a "strong feeling," he says, that he would go to law school. Still, psychology appealed to him.

"I knew it was going to help me in life, and whatever career I was going to decide on," he says. He focused on social psychology, understanding how people interact. Such skills would come in handy after Dayzad earned his J.D. from the University of California-Berkeley.

"I'm half-attorney and half-psychologist," he jokes.

Dayzad started his legal career at Paul, Hastings, Janofsky & Walker, where he focused on employment law. Then he worked at two specialty firms, focusing on immigration law. He opened his own small firm two years ago. Dayzad Law Offices specializes in two areas of immigration and citizenship law: Employment-based immigration, representing employers that are trying to obtain work visas for foreign-born workers or transfer employees to U.S. offices; and family-based immigration cases where he works to help family members stay here or reunite with one another.

"Business immigration is as compelling as any other," Dayzad says of his efforts to help employers keep qualified employees who nevertheless often find their ability to stay in this country blocked by U.S. law and quotas.

"They're working here because they want to give a great start to their families and their kids," he says of the foreign-born workers. "I grew up in a house where words like 'visa' and 'consulate' were household terms. All we wanted was to continue with our lives."

Immigration is a demanding and emotionally rewarding area of law. It's hard to watch a grandparent be deported or see an employer lose a top-notch engineer. But Dayzad has been successful, prevailing in more than 95 percent of his cases.

Dayzad knows there is the perception of the "sleazy" immigration lawyer, taking desperate people's money and poorly representing them. In fact, Dayzad says, some of his clients were victimized by just that type of lawyer.

"They've been ripped off, they're facing deportation proceedings, and they come to me for help," he says. "I take pride in providing responsible and honest legal services to individuals and businesses that need legal counsel."

At the same time his clients include Fortune 500 and international companies, hoping to bring key employees to this country to perform services or develop new products. It is these immigrants that can boost the local economy and strengthen the brainpower of a profession.

In his relatively short career, Dayzad has become deeply involved in efforts to reform immigration law. He has volunteered for the American Immigration Law Foundation, the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights, Immigration Equality and other organizations. He was asked to serve on the Los Angeles Mayor's Advisory Board to advocate for immigrant rights.

And much of what he has seen makes him wonder at what he sees as the seemingly arbitrary—sometimes counterproductive—decisions made by the U.S. Congress to restrict immigration. Consider, for example, what has happened with the H-1B visa for professional workers. At one time, the law allowed 195,000 work visas to be granted each year. Now, only 65,000 visas—plus 20,000 for those with master's degrees from U.S. universities—are granted, thanks to Congress not renewing the earlier quota. Yet, Dayzad says, in 2008, there were 160,000 applications within the first seven days of the filing period. The result is that many employers will not be able to hire workers they were recruiting, and thousands of professionals will have to leave the U.S.

"We're pushing workers we need to build our economy out the door," Dayzad says.

Another example of our immigration law: While opposite-sex couples can obtain green cards and permanent resident status through their relationship, same-sex couples have no such pathway to legal status. Many meet, live together and share lives, only to face separation when the foreign

national's work or student visa expires.

"Clients are forced to make heartbreaking decisions," Dayzad says.

Still, he's seen some progress. Lobbying efforts at Congress to correct such disparities are making headway. But, "It's a long way away," he says.

Looking back to the days when his father remained in Tehran and his mother battled to win the right for him to come here, Dayzad can't help but feel that fate led him to this particular area of the law.

After graduating from law school, he learned the father of a good friend he'd made at Berkeley was the immigration lawyer who got his family their green cards. An accident?

"Karma," Dayzad says. ◀



Dayzad is an amalgam attorney: half-lawyer, half-psychologist.