

# Legal Drama

Top 50 IP attorney Peter Afrasiabi '97 publishes book on incredible immigration case



By Julie Riggott

**When Peter Afrasiabi '97 started work on his latest book three years ago, he could not have guessed how timely it would be when it was finally published April 2017.** *Burning Bridges: America's 20-Year Crusade to Deport Labor Leader Harry Bridges* is the first full account of the true story of the longest deportation battle in U.S. history, a case that spanned four trials over 20 years and went to the Supreme Court twice.

In each case, beginning in 1939, the government tried to frame Australian-born longshoreman Harry Bridges as a Communist in order to have him deported — and permanently silence the powerful voice behind dock workers' rights and an 83-day West Coast strike that ended with the formation of a legitimate union.

"It's remarkably eerie to see what's going on now with a very heavy Executive hand on immigration out of fear of Islam or Muslims or terrorism," Afrasiabi says. "The new immigration orders bring up the same set of issues in the book, set when the Cold War had similar reprisals against alleged Communists and the courts were desperately needed to check the Executive. It's sort of history repeating itself."

Though Afrasiabi is a Top 50 (*Variety Magazine*) intellectual property and entertainment lawyer with One LLP, the book sprang from the pro bono immigration appeals he handles through the University of California, Irvine School of Law Appellate Litigation Clinic, where he is co-director.

One of the cases Afrasiabi regularly cites as precedent that immigrants are entitled to due process is *Bridges v. Wixon*, the first Bridges case that went to the Supreme Court. Usually,

immigration cases have foreign names, so Afrasiabi wondered: "What had Harry Bridges done to provoke the government's wrath and make it to the Supreme Court? I thought, there's got to be some amazing story behind it."

Afrasiabi became interested in immigration law when he was clerking on the Ninth Circuit for Judge Ferdinand F. Fernandez BS '58/ JD '62. "That's when I realized I could do pro bono litigation and really make a meaningful difference," he says. "It's an area of great need because there are so many asylum seekers that don't have counsel and there are so few immigration lawyers."

"Judge Fernandez had the most incredibly sharp intellect," Afrasiabi adds. "I learned how to pull back every layer of the onion until you find a more nuanced way to understand the law you're dealing with."

Afrasiabi says he was also fortunate to clerk for another federal judge with a Gould degree: Alicemarie H. Stotler '67. "Judge Stotler was the most hard-working person you can imagine; she was a public servant working seven days a week and earning a fraction of what partners at big law firms earn," he says. "As a first-year lawyer, it was incredible to see how she analyzed a case and brought objectivity to the decision. She avoided ever getting wrapped up in the heat of emotion."

A Southern California native, Afrasiabi says he was confident that in his decision to attend USC Gould. "The advice I got from many people was that going to USC was the best for one's career if you wanted to live in Southern California because it has such a powerful brand and alumni network community. That's turned out to be true." 🍷