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Garland R. Walker American Inn of Court

It's no secret that participation in the American Inns of Court has provided me (and countless others) with numerous benefits, including meeting new people, forging relationships, and actively promoting civility and professionalism in the practice of law. But can participation provide the opportunity to speak and sing in front of over 1,400 people at a naturalization ceremony? Well, as I recently found out, yes it can.

Judge Christina A. Bryan, a member of the Garland R. Walker American Inn of Court in Houston, Texas, administered the oath of citizenship in June 2024 to 1,474 new citizens during a naturalization ceremony in Houston. As the person administering the oath, Judge Bryan was given the option to invite a guest speaker—someone who has their own immigration story—to give brief remarks at the ceremony. That's when she thought of me. Judge Bryan and I have been members of the same pupillage group for years, and during that time we have gotten to know each other better and forged a strong professional relationship. She remembered that I immigrated to the United States in the 1990s and became a naturalized citizen in 2016. She also remembered that becoming a citizen was a long and arduous road for my family, one that was full of uncertainty, doubt, fear, and ultimately relief.

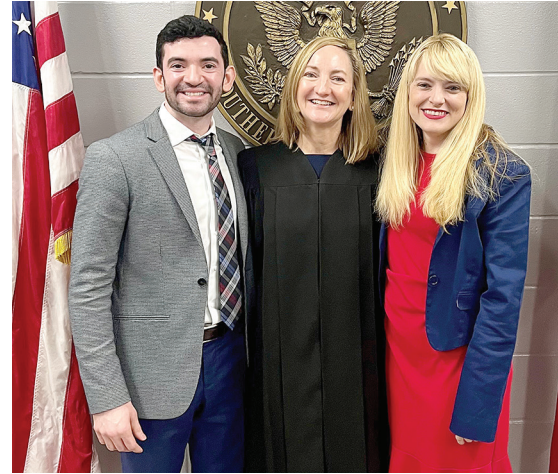
When Judge Bryan asked me to share my story and what it means to be a naturalized citizen, I knew it was the opportunity of a lifetime and quickly agreed. In a full-circle moment, she told me the ceremony would be held at the same place where I took my own oath of citizenship. On June 5, 2024, I—along with my son and my mom—attended the ceremony. After the new citizens took their oath, I spoke to the attendees about reflection, gratitude, and the new chapter that had just begun for the new citizens and their families.

The contribution of the Inn and the relationships formed within did not stop there. The night before the ceremony, the official singer of the national anthem became ill and had to withdraw. The organizers of the ceremony scrambled to find a

replacement singer. Enter Haley Jankowski, Esquire, who is also a member of the same pupillage group as Judge Bryan and me. She recently starred in our pupillage group's Taylor-Swift-themed production. Judge Bryan asked Haley if she was available and to her credit, she was immediately on board. At the ceremony, she sang an emotional rendition of "America the Beautiful" followed by "The Star-Spangled Banner."

Examples like this—where membership in the Inns extends far beyond the regularly scheduled meetings—exemplifies the value of involvement, showing up, and building relationships. The experience of speaking and singing in front of brand-new citizens is one that will remain with me and Haley for a lifetime. And all of it is thanks to relationships built through our Inn membership. ♦

—Sushant Mohan, Barrister Member



Members of the Garland R. Walker Inn, from left to right, are Sushant Mohan, Esq.; Judge Christina A. Bryan; and Haley E. Jankowski, Esq.

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