



Akbari knows these things go down.

## First a Personal Disaster, Then Mass Disasters

*Ilyas Akbari*

**Ilyas Akbari's parents faced an excruciating dilemma:** stay in war-torn and dangerous Afghanistan with their two small children, or do anything to get the family out. At a time when children were prohibited from leaving the country, the Akbaris' drugged their 3- and 2-year-olds, stuffed them into suitcases, and spent their life savings bribing their way out of Afghanistan.

The refugees trekked from Kabul to Pakistan, India, Germany, and finally to their new life in the United States. Akbari's father was a prosecutor and his mother a teacher when they fled Kabul, but they didn't know English; so they worked multiple jobs, took English classes,

and Akbari's father became an auto mechanic. Through sheer determination and hard work, he opened his own shop and now employs several people.

Part of his American Dream was to send his son to college, and he did. Akbari graduated from UC-San Diego with a bioengineering degree. He was inspired to apply his science acumen to the law after meeting several scientist-attorneys through the school's International Society of Pharmaceutical Engineers, a chapter he helped start on campus.

Akbari, an associate at Baum, Hedlund, Aristei & Goldman, focuses on wrongful death personal injury cases. He specializes in commercial transportation accidents involving death or traumatic injury, pharmaceutical products liability and class action lawsuits. "When we first came here, we didn't have anything, but my parents always did what they could

for others," he says. "I'm fighting for people who have lost it all: their lives or the lives of loved ones."

About 80 percent of his caseload involves aviation cases, such as Continental Flight 3407 that crashed and killed 50 in Buffalo last winter; Akbari serves on the plaintiffs' executive committee. He also is working on cases regarding BPA in bottles and the faulty manufacture of Heparin, a blood-thinning medication.

Akbari, who is pursuing his pilot's license in his spare time, is in his element when he melds his expertise in science and law—figuring out the engineering flaw that caused a plane crash or the chemical reaction in a medication that led to serious injury or death. He gets the most satisfaction from helping clients during the worst time in their lives. "That's what I always wanted to do," he says. "Go into a field where I could help others."