

## *Acceptance Speech:*

### *Robert L. Habush, Wisconsin Trial Lawyer of the Year*

As trial lawyers, we become self-assured in our case and our presentation. We have the reputations of being master wordsmiths – having the ability to articulate our position concisely and convincingly. I stand before you tonight, assured only, that I am ill-equipped to adequately convey my deepest appreciation and humility in being honored with this award. When Mike End called me a few weeks back and informed me that I was being recognized as the recipient of Bob's award, I responded by saying all the appropriate things; I was honored, I was flattered, I appreciated it ... my mouth kept speaking and I don't really know what I continued to say. As I continued to blabber on, my mind uncontrollably flashed back to a variance of Lloyd Benson's wonderful 1988 vice-presidential debate response to Dan Quayle: "Mike, I have served with Bob Habush, I know Bob Habush, Bob Habush is a friend of mine ... Mike, I'm no Bob Habush." Indira Gandhi said, "My grandfather once told me that there are two kinds of people, those who work and those who take the credit. He told me to try to be in the first group, there was less competition there." My focus has always been on the work and on the cause of my clients – that makes this unexpected recognition all the more special. Another reason this recognition is especially meaningful to me, is because this award was voted on by a WAJ committee, made up of our peers and our fellow practitioners for whom I have the utmost respect. My nomination was submitted by Dan Rottier, a past recipient of this honor and a guy who knows a thing or two about the highest levels of the practice of trial law. I thank Dan for his wonderful nomination. In being confronted with a recognition beyond that which I thought possible, it was natural for me to wonder how I came to this day. How an ordinary, hard-working guy, is being bestowed with what is nothing short of an extraordinary honor and the joy of working hard. They fostered in me a strong sense of self and a comfort in my own skin, appreciating my gifts and recognizing and accepting the inevitable imperfections. Without them trying to do it and without realizing it, they instilled many positive attributes of a future trial lawyer. They also never attempted to quash a little bit of competitive spirit. With three daughters of my own, my prism of perspective has turned and I've experienced the fact that I take greater joy in my children's successes than they do in their own. Likewise, I take greater joy in my children's successes than I do in my own. I know that attribute is hereditary. For that reason, I am very glad that my mom and dad are here tonight to share in this honor with me. Another reason for any success in my life, is my greatest success, my wife Karyn. It's not an overstatement to say that Karyn is my everything. Ever since law school and throughout my career, Karyn has been my rock and my stabilizing force. She has championed every success I have ever had and found someone other than me to blame for any professional disappointment. Ever since our second daughter was born, Karyn has taken on the toughest and least glamorous, yet most important occupation in the world; full time mom and household CEO. Whenever I have had a tough day, I remember that although our three angels fill our lives with joy, on a daily basis, Karyn is dealing with three of the toughest, most demanding judges, jurors, clients, opposing experts, cross-examiners and drafters and interpreters of their own rules of evidence. Most importantly, Karyn brightens and lightens my life with her unmatched sense of humor. Throughout my career, I have struggled for balance; balance between home, family and work. Being perfectly honest, I haven't been able to achieve the balance I've desired. With my work, travel and long hours, Karyn has taken on more than her fair share of parental responsibilities. I'm sure it's a familiar sentiment for many spouses and significant others here tonight. Only because Karyn has given so much of herself and her time to our

home, our kids, their school and our church, only because of her enormous effort and sacrifice have I, in good faith, been able to devote myself as I have to my clients and their cases. I want to thank my law partners – my work family. Like any family, we feel the sting of each other's losses and we share in the glory of each other's successes. I hope you all feel a measure of pride this evening because this recognition tonight, with me as your proxy, reflects to a large extent, the training, teaching, mentoring and inspiration that I have received from both my senior and less senior partners. Thank you all very much and congratulations to all of you. I want to highlight the special significance of being recognized on the night my friend and partner, Ed Vopal, takes the reigns as President of this wonderful organization. We are in the best of hands. I'm honored to share in what is truly Ed's night. Accepting the presidency of this organization is a self-less act, giving up a major portion of one's professional career, for a year, for the benefit of the group and the causes in which we so strongly believe. Ed will bring his work ethic, his intelligence and his tenacity and it will benefit us all and, more importantly, our clients. Lastly, I want to talk about the biggest reason this recognition means so much to me. The honor in receiving it is commensurate with the immense respect and admiration I have for the award's namesake - - Bob Habush. In this world of Paris Hilton and the Kardashians, we know that fame can occur irrespective of talent or good works - - fame is fleeting and it can come as quickly as it can go. Greatness, on the other hand, takes a life time. The greatness of a career is what prompted this organization to name this wonderful award after Bob ten years ago. Bob, to me, has become what Vince Lombardi was to many of his players. The older I get, the more I realize that every learning experience has ramifications beyond its specific application. Everything I've learned from Bob in depositions, in strategy sessions, in trial, has equal or possibly greater significance in life outside the law. I've had the unparalleled gift of working with, watching and learning from Bob, every day for the past 17 years. My 17 years of gawking are but a blip on his sterling 50 years of fighting the good fight. There is no way to distill all of the lessons I've learned from Bob over the years. The best and most comprehensive example of what I've learned is reflected in my efforts and results over the past 17 years. I've given much of myself and the representation of my clients - - as a matter of self-pride, to provide the best advocacy on behalf of my clients' cause, to promote a just and fair resolution of a conflict. Yet, as powerful as those reasons for my efforts, an ever present force was the desire to pay homage to Bob, his career and his legacy, through the continued successes on behalf of the firm's clients. There are a few lessons that I've taken from Bob that deserve mention: You will win and you will lose, do both with honor to yourself, your client and your profession. Anyone who says they don't lose or have never lost a case, has never fought a tough battle. Loyalty is paramount in all things. Don't judge one's actions only by the result. Lastly, the North Star that has guided Bob's work and actions for 50 years, is that our profession and our calling is a noble one. Most of us are familiar with the Paper Chase's Professor Kingsfield, warning incoming students to look to their left and look to their right, one of you will not be here at the end of the year. I want each of you to look to your left and look to your right, look to the table in front of you and look to the table behind you. You are surrounded by talented people doing great and decent things. We fight on the side of angels. We give voice to those who either have no voice or have a voice so faint and frail, it would be drowned out by the forces of money and power. Whether you work on cases with a value of \$900 or \$99 million, as a member of this organization, you have active hands, an active head and most importantly, an active heart. Your talents and efforts are creating a more just society. Be proud of who you are and what you do. The line separating right and wrong passes not between political parties or the two sides of the case caption but through the middle of every human heart. Our court rooms remain our great societal sieve of resolution – in which the conservative misinformation, deception and lies, gets

drained and dispensed through competent voir dire, the rules of evidence and the power of juror common sense; leaving the facts, the application of law and ultimately, the truth. When that occurs, justice prevails and no matter what the outcome, our system of civil justice wins. Getting this recognition tells me that, at least in this past year, I've scratched the surface of some of the grit, fire, fight, professionalism, excellence and greatness that Bob Habush has embodied throughout his 50 years of practice. This honor is flattering beyond words, is, for me, a professional milestone and inspires me to continue the fight which we have all dedicated our careers to fighting. Thank you again from the bottom of my heart.