

Remarks of Michael Churchill
Andrew Hamilton Award Ceremony
December 9, 2008

Thank you, Judge Pollack for that introduction and the committee for this honor. I am proud to be honored along with Judy Berkman and Linda Ware Johnson.

When Bob told me I was receiving an award for lifetime achievement I was worried that the Committee knew something about my health that I didn't, but I have been assured that is not the case. Therefore I can accept this not only with pleasure but a sense of great relief.

Although this is really an occasion to say thank you to my many friends and colleagues who helped earn this for me, I do want to make a couple of remarks, befitting a "lifetime" of effort and good fortune. The good fortune is exemplified by getting to hear Martin Luther King's great address at the March on Washington, because I was assigned to stand around the Washington Monument and ask people what they thought of the day's events. It was my more serious good fortune, to arrive in Meridian Mississippi the day after Schwerner, Goodman and Cheney went to neighboring Philadelphia, and my personal security that summer benefitted from the federal attention belatedly directed there.

I am aware of how much has changed since those days, and not just because of the Inauguration that is about to happen. When I graduated from law school no bar association had a public interest section to even contemplate giving a lifetime achievement award. So what is this about?

When I look at what I have actually helped accomplish, I am struck by how much the deepest accomplishments were not the result of brilliant lawyering prowess, but arose where the social movements were the strongest. The increases in minority and female employment opportunities typified by the changed composition of the Philadelphia police force which now has 35% Black and 25% women officers – the highest in the nation-- and the decline in discriminatory workplace practices were not the result solely of legal argument but were

influenced by widespread changes in public norms demanded by the civil rights movement. Police misconduct and deadly force shootings declined in Philadelphia not only because of verdicts by lawyers in court but because of victories in elections by candidates committed to change, after PILCOP lawyers had publicly documented the problem. Disability lawyers have secured major changes in the way persons with disabilities are treated because of the public's changing views of what their real abilities are. And when litigation couldn't move the Pennsylvania courts to end the travesty of giving rich students twice the educational resources given more needy students from poverty backgrounds, an unprecedented coalition of over 30 groups which had never been able to work together before was able to persuade the legislature to act. (And the Bar, stimulated by public interest lawyers, was part of that coalition). So if there is a message I see in this award, it is that wonderful as lawyers are at arguing for right and justice, what we accomplish on our own is limited. If it is real change we are after, making sure our work strengthens public understanding and support for our clients would be a wise strategy.

An award for long achievement like this is not only a testament to opportunity and sufficiently strong social movements, but to a more than sturdy support system.

In my case that structure has rested on the twin supports of home and work. My wife Tasha believes even more fervently than I that the essence of the good life is working so that everyone is able to "pursue life, liberty and happiness" - especially happiness. She would have been very unhappy if I had done anything else.

At work I have had extraordinary support from members of the Law Center Board of Directors, like Robert Sayre and Ned Spaeth whose contributions to public interest have been widely recognized, and from Bill Ewing, Pat Temple West, Roosevelt Hairston, Don Joseph, David Smith, Dick Freemann, and of course my two long-time friends, Marciene Mattleman and Shelly Yanoff. These are all people of immense accomplishment, and anyone who couldn't learn from them and become better at doing their job would be pretty hopeless. At the Law Center itself there has been a rich array of people whose work has been so intermingled with mine, that I have happily been credited for much of what they have done: Frank Laski, Jerry Balter, Frank Finch, Alice Ballard, Prather Randle, Tony Black, Eli Cohen, Judy Gran, Lisa Rau, Karen Black, Barbara Ransom, Max Lapertosa, Jim Eiseman, and now Jenny Clarke. I would be proud to claim any part of their work as mine, for all of them have done things, time after time,

which I have marveled at and wondered how they ever found the way to do it. All of us lawyers have benefitted from commitment of persons like Rose Lucas, Cynthia Warfield and Latrice Brooks and so many others who have treated the Law Center's mission as their own. And I cannot overlook Steve Gold who has practiced with us and taught me how much can be accomplished without a lot of fuss, but with a level of directness and skill which is truly remarkable.

That leaves some special thank you's. One is to Ned Wolf, for the vision and energy to have created this wonderful place and to Judge Flora Wolf for her constant support. Secondly, to so many clients who have inspired me, from Al Deal, John Green and Ron Oliver at the Guardian Civic League, community leaders like Mary Rouse, steel workers like Jerry Kauffman and Curtis Worthy, a series of foster parents like the McLaughlins and Fells, Synders, and Daggetts, and activists like Helen Gym and Jerry Mondesire. From them and others I learned many lessons about how much good and courageous work silently goes on every day along with so much silent pain, about how lawyers could in fact help them in ways to be proud of, and how to live other times with the humbling lesson in powerlessness that my clients already knew too well.

Then there is an all too inadequate thank you to my colleague of more than 30 years, Tom Gilhool, who deserves the credit with me, Judge Pollock, for keeping the Law Center alive. I learned much, nearly every day, from Tom, including sometimes what actually I already knew myself, but more often what I had not even thought of. At this point I have trouble knowing which of my thoughts started with me and which with him, but I know I have appropriated many more from him than I gave, and I am the wiser and happier for it, and so are our many clients. My accomplishments would be infinitely smaller without him.

My final thanks goes to the remarkable community of public interest lawyers practicing here in Philadelphia, as noted by Bob Heim, so many of whom are in this room. Your efforts have cultivated and watered our common garden causing all of our plants to grow stronger. There are way too many outstanding contributions for me to single any out. But I feel confident that once again we are going to see movements of public sentiment that will be supportive of our clients, and thus of our work. Support for interventions to ensure greater equality of opportunity for poor and working persons, to assure them equal access to education, health care, housing and social justice, is coming again as the lessons of the failures of trickle down to reach the broad

middle of our society become apparent. I say to all of us, as Daniel Burham, the creator of the Chicago World's Fair said, "Make no little plans." Our public interest community is now strong enough, if it sets its sights to it, to help our clients make the case in the court of public opinion for a **fairer division of the fruits of this most productive of countries** so that no one is denied basic needs and equal opportunities. When we do that, not if, but **when**, we will truly celebrate together achievements worthy of a lifetime.

I will hold this award as a token to await the event. Thank you.