

Thank you President Albano and chairs Kilson and Hart and congratulations to Matt Cregor and the Education Law Task Force. I have to say, "I like the look of this room."

When I visited Number 16 Beacon Street some weeks ago to talk with the staff in preparation for this event I could not help thinking about Ed Barshak and Jack Curtin, the previous recipients of this honor, climbing the then creaky circular stairs to the old Council Room on the top floor as the leadership of our beloved bar addressed issues such as busing and the death penalty and so many, many more. It was there I learned about what I like to call "the peoples' bar" as we worked to create more justice, not more money. Jack's movement to the national stage as he became president of the American Bar and Ed's ever go-to presence in the Boston and Massachusetts legal communities set the example for us all to contribute to the betterment of our society through the skills we honed as lawyers.

I would be remiss if I didn't thank my law firm for the support and encouragement it has provided me in allowing me the time and resources to pursue the opportunities for service that have come my way. More importantly I want to publicly thank my other partner, my wife Marcia, for providing the environment in which I have been able to grow and prosper.

When President Albano called to ask me to accept this honor I told him my only regret was that Marcia would be having surgery the week before and would not be able to join me this morning. I am happy to report that that surgery was a success!!

I began my association with Goodwin Procter fifty years ago as a summer intern. As a boy and young man I was taught by my father the importance of the support of the three legged stool the legs of which were commitment to family, to work, and to community. When I got to Goodwin Procter that whole notion was reinforced. I still remember sitting across a table from one of the principle rainmakers in our firm back in 1972 as he warned me not to let the job rob me of my health, my family or my commitment to the community, perhaps reflecting on a changing environment he was not too pleased with. I remember looking at the activities of the then partners in the firm as they served as chairs of libraries, museums and religious organizations, town moderators, town meeting members and the like. Several years later when I was asked to serve as president of the Massachusetts Black Lawyers Association I asked one of my partners whether I should do it only to get the response that the question was not whether but simply when.

My father who came to this country as a teenager with only an eighth grade education had followed that immigrant tradition of holding multiple jobs while going to school at night ultimately to become a doctor and respected member of his community. He had taught me that I could be almost anything I wanted to be if I got an education and worked hard. I know the meaning of the phrase “Out work them, out think them and out last them.”

The roles I ended up playing would not have been his choice. President of the Massachusetts Black Lawyers yes, President of the Boston Bar Association no. While he would not have counseled seeking leadership in the majority community, he would have “expected” me to lead in our black community in fact viewing it as essential for survival in the majority world. I made the step from the Mass Black Lawyers to the Boston Bar because someone reached out. I made the step from the Boston Bar to the Board of Governors of the ABA because along the way the institutions made opportunity available. The sign that once said no colored allowed now said all colors welcome.

My father had made a comfortable living for our family by catching the scraps that fell from the table and through his efforts and with the help of some of the people in this room, I was able to gain a seat at that table.

In closing I must say that even in these so-called "post-racial" times, we will not be able to assure a just society without the active participation of the bar, as lawyers and through law firms, governmental and corporate employers, and bar associations. As we are witness to the rise of the politics of racial and economic division, I would like to remind us all that we will succeed, not by ignoring our differences, but by acknowledging and embracing them. It is by the work of each of you in this room that we can assure inclusion of all in our great profession. As I said in opening, "I like the look of this room."