

REMARKS OF HALLIE B. LEVIN
PRESENTATION OF THE ASSOCIATION MEDAL TO ALAN ROTHSTEIN
JULY 28, 2015

Welcome. The award of the Association Medal is not – and was never intended to be – a routine event. Rather, it was established in 1951 “to be presented from time to time to a member of the New York Bar who has made exceptional contributions to the honor and standing of the bar in this community.” The City Bar has bestowed this Award on only 24 individuals since its inception – and they include such luminaries as former Chief Judge Judith Kaye, Robert Morgenthau, Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, Arthur Liman, and Cy Vance.

Tonight, we are here to present the Association Medal to our own Alan Rothstein, who has served as the Association’s Counsel (in both the capitalized and un-capitalized senses of that term) for the past three decades. Alan – like his predecessor honorees – exemplifies the ideals that the Medal celebrates. Alan – like his predecessor honorees – has devoted himself to the betterment of our profession and to the rule of law. Alan – like his predecessor honorees – has worked tirelessly in furtherance of justice, opportunity, fairness and equality.

Alan – *unlike* his predecessor honorees – has done so entirely from behind the scenes, without attribution, absent publicity, and with a sense of modesty, humility, politeness, and restraint of ego that brands him, quite frankly, a cultural anachronism.

These are exceptional qualities. They are among the qualities in Alan that we admire the most – and to which we pay tribute tonight. They are, however, qualities that make it *incredibly* difficult to write a speech about Alan. Need a list of Robert Morgenthau’s most notable accomplishments – look no further than *The New York Times*. Want a précis of Justice Ginsburg’s most meaningful contributions to the legal landscape – head to Westlaw. Need some

background material on Cy Vance – Google will take care of that. Not so Alan Rothstein.

Believe me. I tried.

We all know that Alan has been instrumental in shaping and shepherding the work of the City Bar over the last thirty years. We all know that he is the living and breathing repository of the City Bar's history and arcana. And we all know of Alan's decency, kindness, wisdom and judgment. But how many times can one say in a speech: Alan Rothstein is a mensch?

So. When confronted with the privilege of presenting this Association Medal to Alan, wanting to do the utmost to convey his contributions to the City Bar, but armed with only a slim selection of publicly-available information, in desperate need of encyclopedic substantive knowledge, keen insight, and a guiding hand, I did what so many of us sitting here today have done time and time again: I called Alan.

Alan, as he confirmed, received a bachelor's degree from City College, a master's degree in economics from Brown University and his law degree from NYU in 1978. He started his legal career as an associate at Weil Gotshal and Manges, and later became the associate director of Citizens Union, a watchdog for the public interest and an advocate for good government at City Hall and in Albany.

He joined the City Bar in 1985 as Counsel to the Executive Secretary and became the Association's General Counsel in 1994. As Alan put it, although he was working on a variety of policy issues at Citizens Union, the City Bar gave him the opportunity to work on a broader array of subjects within a civic organization, and with the resources to make a significant impact. And what an impact Alan has made.

During his thirty-year tenure at the City Bar, Alan has worked with over 1,000 committee chairs, and has guided the creation of reports, amicus briefs and letters to government officials that must that must exceed that figure by 10 times. Alan has seen the membership of our organization grow from 14,000 to 24,000, and the number of committees rise from 104 to 163. But not only did these numbers increase – so did the diversity of the membership of the City Bar, and of the constituents that it reached out to serve and include within these walls.

Alan described to me – with evident pleasure – the initiation of programs that opened these halls to those from well beyond the worlds of white shoe and Wall Street lawyering. Of a program started in the mid-1980s for immigrants seeking amnesty that brought a line of people to this building that stretched out the door and down the block. Of the Thurgood Marshall Program, which introduced hundreds of New York City public high school students to the City Bar each year for programs about the importance of the Constitution. He described starting the first committee on women in the law; on LGBT law; on social welfare law. In the past three decades the City Bar opened its doors – literally and figuratively – to a new generation of voices and faces. As Alan said: “this building, is really a building to serve the people.” And under his guidance and stewardship, that is what it has become.

When I asked Alan for some examples of work that held particular meaning for him during his tenure, our conversation went a little long. But first out of his mouth was a discussion of the City Bar’s efforts in the aftermath of 9/11. He described getting a call from Mayor Giuliani’s office telling him “we need you to train people in the next 48 hours because we are setting up a program to assist families of the victims.” And that’s exactly what the City Bar did – mobilizing thousands of volunteers to provide legal counsel and guidance to individuals in the wake of that calamity and for years afterward. Alan also spoke of the two-volume compendium

of committee reports, policy statements, and letters to our government authored by the City Bar, in response to the broad and bold empowerment of the Executive Branch and the encroachments on civil liberties and constitutional protections that emerged as a result of 9/11. That treatise, titled “The Imperial Presidency and the Consequences of 9/11: Lawyers React to the Global War on Terror” is over 450 pages in length, and those of us who know Alan are aware that every one of those pages bears some mark and owes some debt of gratitude to him.

Alan also discussed with verve and enthusiasm the decades of work that the City Bar has done in connection with City Charter revision, government ethics reform, ballot access, public campaign finance, legal services funding, access to justice – none of which we have time to go into at length this evening, but all of which benefited enormously from Alan’s behind-the-scenes leadership and thought.

All of this substance, however, wholly fails to capture the divine sensibility and character that Alan has brought to the City Bar for the past thirty years. Which also, of course, brings me right back to the qualities that I mentioned at the outset of these remarks – modesty, humility, politeness, restraint of ego – qualities that make Alan downright *impossible* to roast. How I searched for some hint of eccentricity to share with you all today! An offbeat hobby! A ribald remark! An unconventional pastime! Some inkling of a dark side! I canvassed current colleagues, former colleagues, Executive Committee members, our President, the Former Livings. Nothing. And when Carey Dunne, Sam Seymour and Barbara Opotowsky all tell you that they can’t think of anything to say, you know you’ve hit a serious serious wall.

I thought I was getting somewhere with Al Charne – the former longtime head of the Legal Referral Service. Al started our conversation by saying: “I have a lot of juicy anecdotes,

but I don't think any of them are appropriate for a public speech." My heart jumped! Upon further inquiry, however, all of the anecdotes related to Alan's ability to soothe frustrations among their colleagues when tempers flared from time to time, or to Alan's defense of Al in connection with frivolous but colorful lawsuits brought against the Association arising out of the Legal Referral Service. Not so juicy. When pressed further for any personal details or insights, Al did let slip that "he went dancing with Alan and Claire about 25 years ago and Alan was a surprisingly good freestyle dancer." Now, when later in the conversation I referred to Alan as a "great dancer," Al cautioned "I didn't say he was a great dancer, I said he was a surprisingly good freestyle dancer." Al then went on to describe Alan's love of travel, of reading; his devotion to his family – his wife Claire, and their three sons, Jeremy, Matt and Ethan – many of whom are here tonight.

So, in the absence of anything eccentric or unconventional, any tales of bravado or grandstanding or attention seeking, we must resign ourselves to the truth. As one Former Living put it: "You were always there no matter what, the behind the scenes heart and soul of the entire Association and its work." As another friend described it: "In the midst of towering egos, Alan was always a pillar of reason, restraint, and modesty." Another observed: "When just about any question arose about the City Bar, Alan has long played a role similar to Google – a repository of all imaginable information, except that it's reliable, focused and has no advertising." And yet another friend remarked: "Good will, good cheer and good judgment are not always found together, but you embodied all three virtues at all times."

In my own mind, when I think about Alan, I think of the Wizard of Oz. You'll all remember the giant disembodied head of the Wizard calling down to Dorothy, the Scarecrow, the Tin Man and the Lion when they come to seek his counsel. "I am the Great and Powerful Oz,"

he yells. But of course, that isn't the Wizard of Oz at all. The actual Wizard of Oz is the man behind the curtain. The man who doesn't want to be seen. Who isn't seeking fame or fortune, attention or power. A man wearing a slightly rumpled suit. Not too tall. And it's that man behind the curtain who gives the Scarecrow his brain, the Lion his courage, the Tin Man his heart, and Dorothy her home.

That is what Alan Rothstein has done for all of us, for this Association, and for the entire professional Bar in this great City. He has made us wise and kind and brave. And he has been instrumental in making this place our home. It is with a heavy heart that we say farewell to Alan's great guidance and leadership after thirty remarkable years. But it is with terrific joy that we present this Association Medal to you – Alan Rothstein – our most treasured Wizard of Oz.

* * * * *