

## Robert G. Dicus Acceptance Speech

Mr. President, Past Dicus Recipients, Honored Guests, Family and Friends, GOOD EVENING. Charles, thank you for your introduction, it is a tribute to me to have you as a dear and trusted friend.

Thank you for honoring me by bestowing the Robert G. Dicus Award upon me tonight. Last year I had the privilege of presenting the 40<sup>th</sup> PPS Anniversary Program, which acknowledged the many accomplishments of the past Dicus recipients. I hold this award in high esteem, and now, to be given this award is most gratifying, I AM EXTREMELY PROUD AND HUMBLED.

It has been my good fortune to have known Bob Dicus. In addition, I have had the pleasure of working with all of the previous recipients and to have served on various boards and committee's with eleven of the previous recipients. To be included in the company of such respected colleagues is an honor without comparison.

As I reflect back on the events that lead me to this pinnacle of my professional career, I recall an elderly patient who had a different slant on life. She was a numerologist who determined that the number four was very prominent in my life. Looking back, it is striking to me how many four letter words have influenced me along the way. *Life, pain, care, love, free, goal, hope, hand, mind* and *wife* just to mention a few.

The one person who probably had the most influence on me while growing up was my grandmother, Rose. She was there as both my parents were struggling to survive, with Dad away during WW II and my Mother forced to work. Later, when I had an opportunity to go away to college on a track scholarship, it was my grandmother Rose who insisted that I go, in deference to my Father, who felt I could stay home, work in the local cement plant and attend the local junior college. My little sister, Judy, born soon after the WWII, would later do me the great honor of following me into this great profession. She has been and integral part of our successful *life* and practice for many years. As I stand before you, one thought stands out. **I did not arrive here tonight alone.**

After receiving a degree in Physical Education from Iowa State Teachers College, I was accepted into the Graduate Program of Physical Therapy at The University of Iowa under the tutelage of Olive "Mother" Farr and Wm "Shorty" Paul, MD,. I was soon to learn that life held many turns, which I was inadequately prepared for. First, the last polio epidemic in Iowa exposed me to the reality of human suffering and disability. As Physical Therapy students we were enlisted to treat the many new polio cases that were brought to the University Hospital from all over the state. Soon to follow was the sudden adjustment to the death of a patient -- a child -- merely five years old, who I had treated the day before. As students, none of us expected to confront this aspect of life or death, when choose a career in Physical Therapy. This *pain*, brought us together, to bond as we faced this despair together. We learned that it was OK to *care*, to cry, and to hurt. On

my graduation day from the Physical Therapy Program, my first son was born, but unexpected birth defects meant that I would never hold him, never take him home. I learned that *love* from others was a healing balm when darkness seemed to be all around. N. Scott Peck wrote, "*LIFE IS WHAT HAPPENS TO US WHILE WE ARE MAKING OTHER PLANS*"

I accepted my first position as a staff PT in Minneapolis, MN. After my first year I accepted the challenge of creating a brand new Physical Therapy service in a small hospital in Hamilton, OH. That opportunity was ideal. I had *free* reign to design and operate that service as I saw fit! I was considered the expert. After all, no one in the hospital really knew what Physical Therapy could or could not deliver. The fun was about to begin. What has happened to me over the past four decades attests to the benefits of being involved actively in my profession.

Let's face it; it was my legs and Coach Bill Moore's encouragement that enabled me to seek a college degree. It was through the urging of my college Coach, Art Dickinson, that I learned that Physical Therapy was a professional career worth pursuing. It was the chastisement, by the late Doris Hall, PT at an Ohio APTA District meeting that stimulated me to expand my personal communication skills and knowledge in, of all things, Robert's Rules of Order. This challenge taught me that it was better to engage my brain before opening my mouth and was far more effective and a lot less frustrating. This same challenge started me down the road of active association participation.

The great metropolis of Hamilton, OH lies midway between Cincinnati and Dayton, OH. The Ohio Chapter made it optional for me to choose between the two districts. Initially, I attended meetings in both cities. As a matter of expediency, I thought, I volunteered to chair the same committee for both districts. This was soon met with objections from the "old guard" in Cincinnati, so off I went to Dayton where the climate was less hostile and the group far more compatible. Little did I know that my soon to be political base was taking root. I can honestly say that getting into leadership roles during these past years was never an objective early in my career. As the frustrations and unwelcome outside influences, such as Medicare and the Ohio Bureau of Workers Compensation began to dictate how I could conduct my practice, I developed a passion to do whatever it took to make a difference. A passion to affect a change in external bodies controlling my career. This passion, some said I had too much passion, was at times, a very forceful and consuming drive. As I entered each succeeding political race, my home district support never wavered. My Physical Therapy family continued to demonstrate their *care* for me and for the issues we all felt very strongly about. Over the years, I came to appreciate the value of my participation in the Association and the relationships formed. One cannot begin to assess the value of this loyalty, friendship and support gained through such relationships until you look back.

I have been very fortunate to have had some excellent mentors. At Iowa, Whitney Powers, PT who had a speech and hearing impairment, taught me about communication skills. He made me aware of understanding my patient's needs. The late Eugene "Mike" Michels gave me insight into my own abilities; that I could attain multiple goals with

good organization and time management. Serving under Charles Magistro and Robert Bartlett taught me to be true to ones self and to remain vigilant and persistent. Charles gave me an opportunity to Chair the Association's first Public Relations Committee and exposed me to fiscal responsibilities and *goal* attainment. Dudley Kramer, PT, who few of you knew, was my alter ego. He was the prod that kept my emotions from bottoming out, that *hope* for success was possible. Florence Kendall, PT always stressed the importance of the *hand* and *mind* connection in the continuum of patient care. I have always recognized that "touch" is a significant part of patient care and has been reaffirmed by Florence time and time again. I always felt I was blessed with good touch. As a young Ohio state president, I learned that adversarial relationships with icons like Geneva Johnson and Dorothy Pinkston were elements in understanding organizational structure. Patience and temperance were not always virtues that characterized my demeanor, Charles Hall, PT and Robert Steffl, PT, friends since the early 60's, broadened my horizon and were instrumental in my leap into private practice. They were always supportive, instructive and willing to share their knowledge and experiences. **I did not arrive here tonight alone!**

I mention these events because they have been fundamental in my growth, and they have immeasurably enriched my *life*. My commitment to the elected positions I have been privileged to hold, required the investment of many personal hours and allocation of personal resources that detracted from traditional life. The return on that investment has been the knowledge and satisfaction of creating and operating successful practices throughout my career. I have been a satisfied and effective clinician to many patients entrusted to me. The *care* that I have been able to provide to my patients can be directly attributed to my overall growth as a person.

I have often extolled the virtues of "Networking" as part of our continuing education programs and annual conferences. This was not just hype, intended to increase attendance but my personal conviction that we, as a group, have many answers to nagging problems that we face from time to time and freely share those answers with each other. All of us are pressed for time in our daily lives, and most of us are probably overcommitted. When then, do we find the time to develop meaningful peer relationships? Unless your best friend is also a Physical Therapist, and in my case also my *wife*, where is the time to nurture such interaction? What better way to address pressing issues than over a meal, coffee, etc than at a gathering of concerned and informed professionals? I certainly have been given enormous help by many of my peers; and in turn, have gladly returned the favor by passing on hints, forms, sample contracts, etc. to others who were just starting or expanding their practice. In addition, it has always been easy to pick up the phone and make a call or two. Now, with email, I can communicate around the globe. My experience as Vice-Chairman of the *International Private Practitioners Association* has expanded my network around the world.

Friends, private practicing Physical Therapists are facing the same problems and challenges the world over. We need to consolidate our thoughts and address these concerns as one voice. What we have to offer is of great value to those we serve. Our



health care system [managed care] is advocating ideas which are not necessarily healthy or productive. We need to be willing to seek the experiences of others, share our ideas on both positive and negative aspects of this complex system we are a part of today. Managed care schemes, workers compensation contracts and publications like "*Acute Low Back Problems in Adults*" are quickly picked up by foreign governments and regulators. Our issue is to stimulate our colleagues to promote Physical Therapy as an integral element of the health care system and we need to be prepared to defend Physical Therapy whenever necessary. We are seeing globalization and global integration of some of these concepts occurring at ever increasing rates. Opportunities abound for International Organizations to influence the shape of things to come [1].

There is little doubt that we as Physical Therapists work hard to deliver quality patient care. The challenges that we have and continue to face have not been easy. Encroachment by other providers [POPTS], increased regulations, diminished reimbursement, will demand our attention and we have the ability to succeed if we act together. We have not been successful in securing our right to practice independently. I shudder to think what will happen if we do not continue this fight.

Recently, a student group questioned a number of independent PT practice owners about their motives for entering private practice. Is it any surprise to you that; autonomy, independence in decision making, control over patient care, and the ability to provide quality patient care were the qualities that those practitioners quoted. As I looked at the qualities of those who preceded us in this Section, I found the same characteristics throughout these forty plus years. Why then, are we seeing so few joining our ranks and attending our meetings? According to the latest APTA survey, those who consider themselves to be in private practice, is second only to hospitals, by less than a percentage point. Have we failed to emphasize the benefits of working for the betterment of our profession? The pulling together for the greater good? Have we made it so good that the perils we have to overcome no longer poise a threat to their profession? Are our coattails so plentiful that the rewards outweigh the problems that still exist? Will we awake one day and wonder why we have lost our place in the health care system, and the right to practice independently lost forever? I expect you and this Section to overcome those fears

**I did not arrive here tonight alone. And each of you cannot proceed into the future alone.** Without networking, without mentoring, without mutual respect and support for each other achieving your collective goals is going to be difficult.

In closing, I would be remiss if I did not speak for a moment from a rejuvenated repaired heart. Physical Therapy has been many four letter words for me, but the one which best exemplifies how I feel about my life experience is *love*. The love I see and feel every day. My family Rose, Pam & Todd, Adam & Erin, sister Judy & Dean and my wife Linda; have provided the spark that drove this engine. My staff, now over 40 in number, as typified by Leslie, Kim, Rose, & Fred; are the extension of all that I believe. My friends, be it the Cincinnati or Dayton Groups, my Board colleagues, or the many around the globe and the United States; like Chuck & Margaret Hall, Jack & Gaye Close, and

Phil & Elaine Tygiel are as unique as we are diverse. They and You, are the gifts that I have been blessed to receive.

**Yes indeed, I did not get here tonight alone!**

I am thrilled to be the 1997 recipient of the Robert G. Dicus Award. I accept it in gratitude to all who have made it possible for me. Thank you, I love you all, God Bless you! Good night!

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Peter A. Towne', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Peter A. Towne, PT  
November 15, 1997