A TRIBUTE TO

ROBERT J. MICHAEL, ESQ.

1949 – 2016

Robert James Michael was born August 22, 1949, and died June 17, 2016, at the age of 66. He was raised in Ithaca, and graduated from SUNY at Buffalo in 1971, majoring in English. He graduated from Cornell University Law School in 1975. Bob’s first legal work in Rochester was with Harris Beach.

I first met Bob while he was an associate in the office of Jay M. Friedman, Esq., in 1979. They later formed the partnership of Friedman and Michael. Their practice became a highly respected plaintiffs’ civil litigation firm, often representing the catastrophically injured in products liability, medical malpractice, and other personal injury cases. In 1986, Bob became a sole practitioner, continuing in those areas of practice. Bob was known for his highly ethical, zealous, and innovative representation. He had several cases that went before the Court of Appeals, two of which changed the law of conflicts and product liability.

Bob was known for his quick and incisive mind, his encyclopedic knowledge and expansive vocabulary, but mostly for his keen wit and sense of humor, which were often uproarious. His conversation and oratory was often laced with anecdotes, colloquialisms, and bits of off-color humor in appropriate company. He enjoyed the camaraderie of friends and colleagues and occasional after hours carousal. Bob was fun, entertaining and popular.

Bob was never one to back down from a challenge or confrontation, and would not tolerate sharp practice from adversaries. Disrespect was met by Bob with choice words of witty sarcasm, and was not soon repeated. Bob had a dignity about him in and out of court, but he practiced with a unique, often whimsical, self-effacing sense of humor that was enjoyed by the bar, jurists, and clients alike. He had many diverse interests: fine wines, cheeses, gourmet fare, cigars and boxing, to name a few. He was a near-scratch golfer, as well as an accomplished musician, having played several instruments.

Bob’s career was tragically shortened by multiple sclerosis. He was diagnosed with that illness in 1998, and he was forced to retire at the age of 55. He struggled for many years with his affliction as it became progressively more debilitating. Eventually he lost all vitality, mobility, and independence, but never his wit or cognitive abilities. He met the challenges of his illness with great poise and acceptance despite knowing
that his condition would lead to a difficult, inevitable demise. Instead of being sad or forlorn by his losses, he consistently expressed thanks and gratitude that his mind and positive demeanor were unaffected by his illness. I frequently visited Bob in his retirement. Even when his condition became a genuine ordeal, I never saw him express self-pity or bitterness at his misfortunes. His positive demeanor and cheerfulness were never failing.

Bob was blessed with the strong love and support of his family. He is survived by his wife of 25 years, Colleen Farley Michael, and their son, Ian. Ian shares Bob's talent and passion for music. Ian's performances and recognition were a great source of pride for Bob. Unfortunately, Bob passed away shortly before his son's graduation from Berkeley College of Music in Boston. He received the daily loving care of his wife and son up to his last days. His professional caregivers often expressed their fondness for Bob and their admiration for his courage.

In practice Bob had the best qualities we admire in our profession. Particularly during his last years, he was genuinely inspirational. Bob will be greatly missed and remembered fondly by all who knew him.

Respectfully submitted by:

Thomas R. Monks, Esq.