

# PROFILE IN PROFESSIONALISM

## Robert B. Jobe, Esquire

### 2016 Professionalism Award for the Ninth Circuit

By Jennifer J. Salopek



Robert B. Jobe, Esquire, received the American Inns of Court 2016 Professionalism Award for the Ninth Circuit in July at the Ninth Circuit Judicial Conference, which was presented to him by the Honorable Mary M. Schroeder.

Jobe is in private practice in San Francisco, where since 1990 he has specialized in immigration law. Widely recognized as one of the nation's finest immigration litigators, Jobe and his colleagues have represented clients in more than 70 precedential cases, helping to shape current immigration law. He has litigated at all levels of the federal court system, including the Supreme Court of the United States, and testified before the U.S. House of Representatives on the need to enact legislation to implement the United Nations Convention against Torture. Jobe has served as counsel in several of the most significant immigration cases of the past decade. Specifically, he has influenced such issues as asylum law, suspension of deportation, visa processing, and criminal aliens.

A native of Flint, Michigan, Jobe spent weekends and vacations working at a grocery store. When he wasn't working or running track, he was reading—an avid reader, he especially remembers being influenced by *All the President's Men*, which inspired visions of a future as a journalist. As an undergraduate at the University of Michigan, he would run to the law school quad, a space he describes as majestic and inspiring. He became very active politically in college, participating in demonstrations against apartheid and majoring in political science. Although Ann Arbor now is known as a bastion of liberalism, Jobe says that most of his fellow students at the time were apathetic: "They thought we were strange."

During a post-graduation job with the Michigan Judiciary Committee in East Lansing, Jobe found himself surrounded by lawyers. "I thought, hey—this is cool. I could do something with this." He decided to apply to law school, but it was a fellowship after law school that helped Jobe find his true calling. He spent six months in El Salvador as an America's Watch fellow, documenting human rights abuses. The experience inspired his interest in helping refugees and asylum seekers and drove his specialization in immigration law.

"I went to law school because I wanted to help people," he says. "I was idealistic, fighting for the underdog, and it became my mission."

After passing the bar in Michigan, Jobe moved to San Francisco to become an associate at McCutcheon, Doyle (now Bingham McCutcheon). His two-year tenure with the firm—and the firm's leadership's indulgence—gave him the chance to hone his skills, even though more than half of his work was pro bono.

"I was a terrible associate in terms of billable hours. I wasn't really interested in representing corporate clients, but the people at the firm put me on the pro bono committee and gave me lots of opportunity to do pro bono work. It was amazing," he says.

In his first case, Jobe represented a young South American woman who had been working with the guerrillas in her country and was seeking asylum in the United States. He put in hundreds of hours on the case, learning all about asylum law, eventually even teaching classes on the subject. When the case was due to be decided, "I couldn't sleep the night before; I was so nervous. I was responsible for someone else's future," Jobe says. Although he actually lost that case, hundreds if not thousands of clients have put their futures in Jobe's hands.

Things have improved for Jobe's clients in the past two-and-a-half decades. "The immigration process was completely broken 20 years ago," he says. "It was a circus—completely arbitrary. The judges were lazy, disinterested, even downright rude. That's what motivated me to take cases on appeal. The federal courts are a different environment."

Jobe spent nine years working on a single case, that of Harpal Singh Cheema and his wife. A friend and fellow lawyer, Cheema sought asylum in the United States after having been arrested, imprisoned, and tortured in India. The legal battle over the use of classified evidence resulted in 27 hearings in immigration court and years in front of the Board of Immigration Appeals.

"We never had the opportunity to seek bond in front of a neutral arbiter. There was no due process. It was an outrage," says Jobe. Even so, "I find the legal landscape fascinating and frustrating," he says. ♦

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