

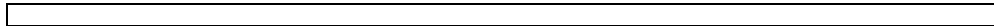
**Remarks of
The Honorable Jesse Brown
Former Secretary of Veterans' Affairs**

**Upon Acceptance of the
National Commander's Award
as the 2000**

Outstanding Disabled Veteran of the Year

**At the 79th National Convention of the
Disabled American Veteran**

Reno, Nevada August 20, 2000



National Commanders Mike Dobmeier and Paula
Raymond

National Adjutants Art Wilson and Maria Tedrow

Officers and leaders of our great organizations

My dear friends on the DAV's staff, particularly my
fellow NSOs

and you, the members of the DAV and Auxiliary:

Thank you so much, Mike. Ill always treasure
this kindness. But you know, I feel kind of funny
accepting this award.

I've been around the DAV for a long time. There
are many others, I know, who deserve this honor
more than me many right here in this room.

I feel humble, but I accept this award because it
gives me a chance to say "thank you" to the DAV and

Auxiliary members who stood with me all these years.

When I think of our organization, I feel like a man with a million personal friends. ***Who do you know who can say he has a million friends cheering him on?***

Like the great poet John Donne, I understand fully that "No man is an island."

Yes, I worked hard all of my life, and I asked for nothing. Yet I have been given so much.

What can I say about the family in which I grew up? They built the foundation of what I am today. What can I say about my wife, Sylvia, who has shared all my trials and triumphs?

I am a man whose family has been ever at his side cheering him on!

I have been blessed with many friends. Among the stars in my constellation, though, no one shines brighter than Mrs. Lois Pope. This great lady's counsel shows me so much about life's meaning.

Mrs. Pope taught me that it is not how *long* you live but how *well* you live that really matters. And she taught that profound lesson through the example of her own extraordinary life:

by bringing clean water to kids in countries ridden with poverty,

by working toward new treatments for paralysis,

by building the spirit of giving among our nation's children,

by sending disadvantaged kids to summer camp to learn crucial life skills and a positive foundation for living,

and, so important to the members of the DAV, by leading a drive to erect a memorial to disabled veterans on the Washington Mall.

What a philanthropic spirit! What a amazing gift
*to have a friend like Mrs. Lois Pope, cheering me
on!*

But my family and my friends are surely not
alone.

What can I say about the DAV? Because of the
DAV, I have lived a life that most people can only
dream about.

The members of the DAV and Auxiliary shape
my dreams and energize my life.

Those wonderful people took time today to
applauded me. And today, I intend to applaud them
the members of the Disabled American Veterans and
the DAV Auxiliary.

Any light that shines on me is a light that reflects directly onto them. They are my dearest friends, and as I said

I am a man who has a million friends cheering him on!

How can I explain what these friends meant when I was a shattered young man, coming home from Vietnam to begin life anew as a disabled veteran!

They picked me up. They pointed the way to a new life. They carried me through the longest and most bitter trials I faced.

I am a man who has a million friends cheering him on!

In better times, the members of the DAV lifted me high on their shoulders in all of my triumphs.

Im a common man just as most of them are very ordinary men and women but they made me feel like a prince. And perhaps thats true, if I am one of them which I am, and will always be.

Theirs is a royalty of the spirit. It allowed them to do great things in the service of our nation deeds that were very uncommon and extraordinary.

How can I do anything but succeed when *I have a million friends such as these cheering me on!*

As a DAV National Service Officer, I was given the opportunity to create a better quality of life for our nations heroes and heroines!

As the years went on, you in the DAV gave me greater and greater responsibility. And when I became Executive Director of the DAVs Washington Headquarters, *you were there, cheering me on!*

Then there was yet another opportunity of exceptional proportions.

Many in this audience were young men and women back in the 1940s when I was born. Back then, who could have thought an African-American kid from the South Side of Chicago would someday serve in the Cabinet of the President of the United States.

I will never forget that you were with me all the way during my years as Secretary for Veterans Affairs, and we did great things.

We re-engineered the VA medical system, making it ready for the 21st Century, and ***you were there, cheering me on!***

We made the system much more user-friendly for America's veterans, and ***you were there, cheering me on!***

We moved the VA into leadership in several areas of health care delivery, and *you were there, cheering me on!*

We brought new sensitivity to the VA benefits system, and *you were there, cheering me on!*

We carried forth an unrelenting drive for quality and timeliness in VA benefit decisions, and *you were there, cheering me on!*

We expanded VA cemetery services so we can bury our nation's heroes and heroines with dignity, and *you were there, cheering me on!*

I will remember always, if I achieved anything while I served in the President's Cabinet, I was able to do so because *you were there, cheering me on!*

And I will count upon you, my friends, once again today, as I embark upon a future of great uncertainty.

Just a few months ago, I was flying high. I had moved into the world of business, and I thought I had that world by the tail.

And then it came a sudden, jarring crash.

I am ill, very seriously ill.

There is no cure for Lower Motor Neuron Syndrome at least not yet, though I am hopeful about the research that's being done.

To repeat what was in the film, this is very much like ALS or what is called Lou Gehrig's Disease. But it moves much more slowly.

What I have is similar to what the famous physicist, Stephen Hawking, has. Its fatal, but it can take 15 to 20 years.

Unless there is a cure, as time goes by, Ill become more and more like Stephen Hawking. My mobility will be taken from me, bit by bit, until it is gone.

I am not afraid.

Nor am I bitter.

The fact is, I am grateful.

I have enjoyed tremendous opportunities in my life, and they have come to me because you were ***at my side, cheering me on.***

And in this troubled time in my life, my family, my friends, and my fellow disabled veterans ***will be at my side again, cheering me on.***

One of the first to know of my illness was Mrs. Lois Pope. Right away, thanks to her concern, doctors from around the world began to call the finest minds in medicine today!

And I recalled her great lesson: Its not how *long* you live, but how *well* you live, that matters.

Im grateful, believe me, to have ***Mrs. Pope at my side, cheering me on.***

And I know, regardless of what happens, I can depend upon you.

In this audience, I see men and women who have gone before me who have shown that disability is not the end that it can be a new beginning.

Your lives illustrate the definition of determination. Your lives stand as beacons, guiding the way for anyone who's seeking new hope. Life is so wonderful with *people like you, cheering me on!*

I am inspired by your devotion to the core principle of the DAV: one disabled veteran helping another disabled veteran in a time of need.

Each of us has progressed through life with our fellow DAV members at our side. We've done much more than rebuild our own lives. We brought light and hope into the lives of others.

We have been there for each other, one million of us, *cheering one another on.*

Our lives are useful and productive because we are resolved to live life to the fullest, yes but also because we are a team, a family.

The teamwork of the DAV family is an engine in the life of each one of us.

It has powered us through times of puzzlement and piercing pain. It will carry us to better things tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow.

As I leave here, there may be a limp in my gait. But I walk on as a proud man, because ***I am a man with a million personal friends, cheering me on.***

As I greet you today, my speech may be a little slurred, but there is great happiness in my voice because ***with a million personal friends, cheering me on, I will prevail.***

Be blessed, each of you.

Remember that Jesse Brown loves you that he is a brother to you.

Remember that Jesse Brown is grateful for everything you have meant to him and you have meant the world!

Thank you, my brothers and my sisters.