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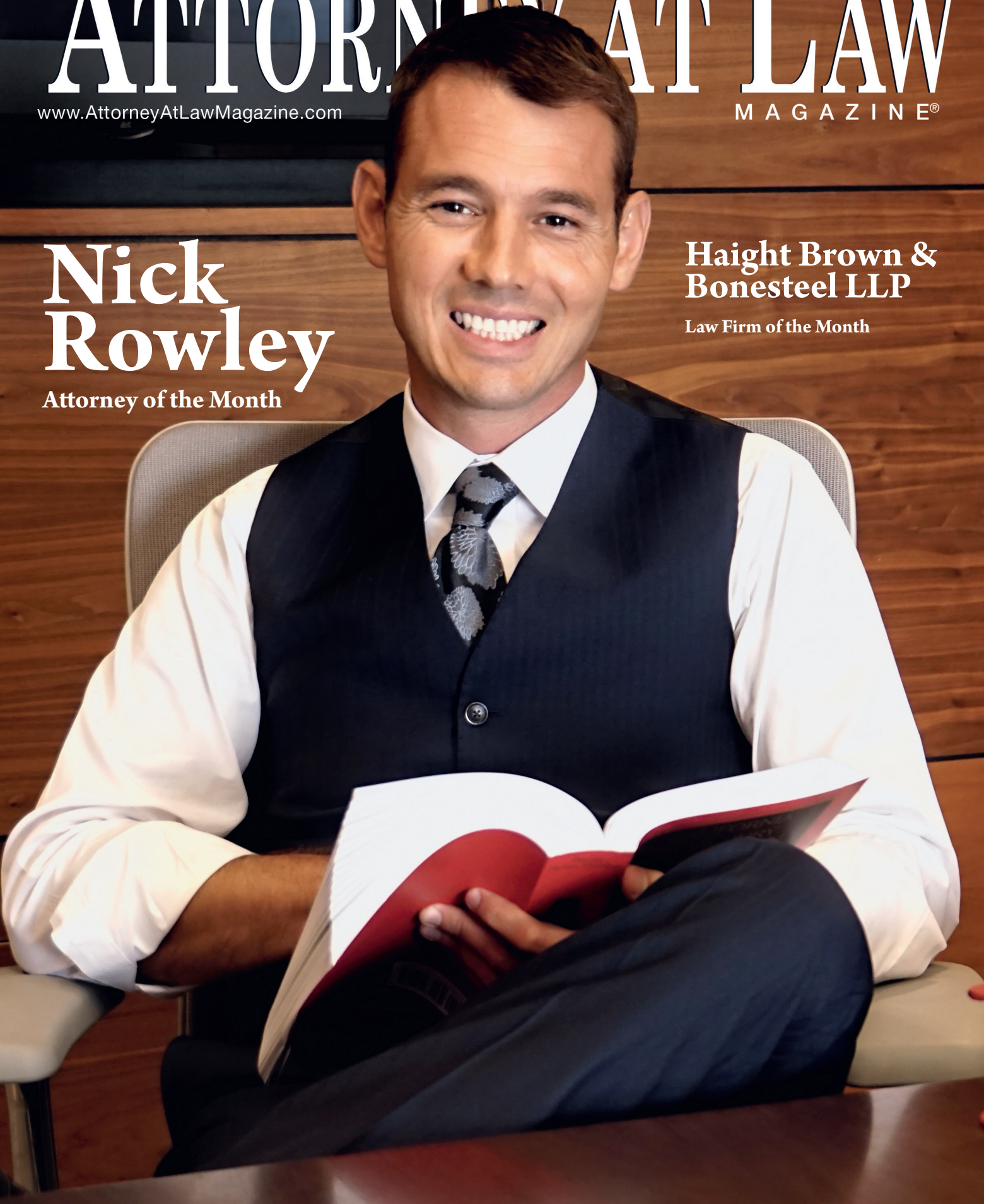
MAGAZINE®

Nick Rowley

Attorney of the Month

Haight Brown & Bonesteel LLP

Law Firm of the Month



Nick Rowley

Champion for the People

By Susan Cushing

I'm a new generation of trial lawyer," says award-winning and record-setting trial attorney Nicholas C. Rowley. "Which is more like the older generation of trial lawyers."

Rowley goes on to describe what he perceives as a noticeable shift in how attorneys began practicing law in the 1970s and 1980s.

"About 40 years ago, a new model of law firm came to exist which focused more on quantity versus quality," he says. "We've seen a shift of lawyers going from taking cases because they believed in the case and in the jury system to taking as many cases as possible with the expectation that they're going to settle. It's all about, alternative dispute resolution — where clients become just another file number or widget on an assembly line."

It's a subject he's obviously passionate about because standing up for justice and fighting for those who cannot defend themselves, is why Rowley became a lawyer in the first place. "Being a trial lawyer means dedicating oneself to standing up for the rights of people," he says, "never selling out, and caring about truth and justice. Many of my clients become family to me. I give them my all."



Dan Sharp Photography





As a partner at Carpenter, Zuckerman & Rowley in California and the founder of Trial Lawyers for Justice, which is a Midwest based trial firm out of Iowa, Rowley lives up to this commitment every single day. Perhaps it's because his path was not an easy one — his memories of living homeless are still vivid. He certainly doesn't view life from an ivory tower; he understands too well the harsh realities of existing on the losing end of society. He does what he can to level the playing field.

One way he's made a significant difference, is in restoring respect to the field of personal injury representation. "We all know there's the personal injury business," he says. "We've got the lawyers who first took up the yellow pages, then moved to billboards, or radio and TV ads. They advertise themselves as the one to call when someone is in need, yet they've never even stepped foot in front of a jury. We see them all over in every state. It's disconcerting, seeing lawyers taking cases that they have no business handling."

On the other hand, Rowley, only 40 years old, is arguably the most accomplished trial attorney of his generation. He has been mak-

ing history in courtrooms across the country year after year. With extensive courtroom experience, and over 130 jury trials, he represents victims of serious injuries, medical malpractice and wrongful death. He has become particularly renowned for his work on behalf of those suffering traumatic brain injuries, spinal injuries and chronic pain. Rowley has been named as a finalist by the Consumer Attorneys Association of Los Angeles for its prestigious Trial Lawyer of the Year award six different times for record setting jury verdicts. At age 33, Rowley was recognized by the Los Angeles Daily Journal for winning a Top Verdict of 2010 of \$31.6 million on behalf of a victim of a traumatic brain injury. In 2012, he was a finalist for the Consumer Attorney of the Year award, given by Consumer Attorneys of California. The Consumer Attorneys of San Diego presented him with their Outstanding Trial Lawyer award in 2009, and in 2013 he was honored with the organization's top award — Outstanding Trial Lawyer of the Year.

Those who knew Rowley as a restless and angry teen would be surprised to see how far he has come and how much he's achieved. "I

ended up getting in a lot of fights in school," he says, "and was actually expelled from every school from the fourth grade through the 11th grade. I was a pretty angry kid."

Much of this anger was directed at his parents, both biological and step. In fact, Rowley says he was living on his own by the time he was 15 and eventually became emancipated, joining the military at age 17.

"I worked two or three jobs at a time," he says, by way of explaining how as a young teen he survived on his own. "There was a six-month period where I paid a co-worker \$50 a week to sleep on his couch, so I would have a place to shower."

As the oldest of seven kids, Rowley witnessed the myriad changes his parents went through, eventually impacting all of their lives. Born in a small town and spending his first few years on a farm in Storm Lake, Iowa, Rowley grew up country. He began working at age 10 and buying his own clothes. "I worked in the soy bean and corn fields when I was kid and learned how to work hard spending summers on my grandparents' farm," he says. "As the oldest, I always had chores and someone I needed to take care

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of.” Today, he is a loving, involved and protective father to 10 children.

A crash in the farming industry, effectively put an end to the comparatively idyllic life on the farm. “My dad went to college and became an art teacher, which didn’t pay much especially when you have nine people to provide for,” says Rowley. “My mom was a full-time mom, and would work as a waitress for extra money when she could. We rarely had a working telephone line, and hot water for bathing often came from a big pot from the stove.”

His parents divorced when Rowley was in the fourth grade. His mom remarried a Navy Seal who had served in Vietnam, a man who would become a tremendous influence and father in the young man’s life, but not before Rowley had gone through many challenges including living in a van in a parking lot with his father at times.

Rowley credits the U.S. Armed Forces with helping him turn his life around. “It certainly defined me and taught me discipline,” he says. “It also gave me a good outlet for all that anger, and then it shifted when I trained to become a medic and learned to care for

people. I didn’t have a family that was going to be able to afford to put me through college, so I served my country in exchange for an education.”

Long before he ever imagined being able to go to law school, Rowley discovered a hero with whom he could identify. “I went to law school because I had followed Gerry Spence ever since I was a kid,” says Rowley. “He had represented a man from my home town named Randy Weaver, of Ruby Ridge notoriety. I, like everyone else had a completely negative attitude toward Weaver until Spence showed up and told the truth about what really happened there. I was so impressed, I continued to follow his career.”

“I never thought I’d ever be able to go to law school, it was more of a dream,” Rowley adds, “but with the GI Bill, it was suddenly within my grasp and I put everything I had into becoming an attorney who would be worthy of Gerry Spence’s time.”

In 2004, Rowley got the opportunity to meet and be mentored by Gerry Spence after Spence personally invited him to attend the full-length Trial Lawyers College in Dubois, Wyoming. Rowley and Spence



Dan Sharp Photography

became and remain close friends. Rowley now serves as an instructor on advanced trial skills nationwide as one of the most sought out lecturers on advanced trial skills. He has served multiple times as a presenter and teacher at Gerry Spence’s famed Trial Lawyers College. It’s also where he met his current wife, Courtney, who is also a trial lawyer.

“After the Trial Lawyers College in 2004 I continued to go to the advance trial skills seminars for two weeks in August year after year. I studied Moe Levine’s tapes and writings and also learned from nationally renowned trial lawyers like Rick Friedman, Don Keenan, Brian Panish, Tom Girardi, and Gary Dordick,” he says. “I’ve been lucky to have great mentors.



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At A Glance

Carpenter, Zuckerman & Rowley

8827 West Olympic Blvd.
Beverly Hills, CA 90211
(310) 273-1230
www.czrlaw.com/

Trial Lawyers for Justice

421 W Water Street, 3rd Floor
Decorah, IA 52101
(866) 854-5529

Practice Areas

Medical Malpractice
Personal Injury
Wrongful Death

Education

Juris Doctor, La Verne Law School
Bachelor of Science, Park University

Professional Memberships

Consumer Attorneys Association of
Los Angeles
Consumer Attorneys of California
Consumer Attorneys of San Diego
American Association for Justice
Iowa Association for Justice

Community Involvement

Los Angeles Trial Lawyers
Charities, Board of Governors
Imagination Workshop, Board of
Governors

Hobbies

Traveling
Yoga
Scuba Diving

Family

10 Children: 7 Boys, 3 Girls

Favorite Quote

"The most difficult thing is the decision to act, the rest is merely tenacity." — Amelia Earhart

"When I came out of law school I put the word out that I would try any case, anywhere against any one, as long as it was a case and a client worth fighting for," he adds. "My reputation as a relentless trial lawyer who could win cases other lawyers wouldn't even take to trial developed pretty quickly."

Not only has his stellar reputation continued to grow, the admiration he's so long felt for Spence is heartily reciprocated. When interviewed, the legendary trial lawyer Gerry Spence and celebrated author, who wrote the 1995 best-seller "How to Argue and Win Every Time," called Rowley, in an email to The Jefferson Herald, "a young man with undefinable talent." Spence now almost 90 has also said of Rowley, "I can't predict where Nick will go with his massive gifts. He is unpredictable, which is part of his charm and power." Spence who is familiar with Rowley's body of work also said that Rowley "could change the justice system."

Believing in the people and cases he fights for as well as his own skills, Rowley doesn't allow naysayers to cause him a moments concern. Just recently, in September, he won a record setting \$10 million verdict on a medical malpractice case for the wrongful death of an 80-year-old man in Dubuque, Iowa, where he was told no one could win a medical malpractice case. The case is another record setting verdict.

At the time of this interview, Rowley had gone from California to Iowa and then up to Alaska to take an equally challenging case to trial. The case involves a Native American man, who was severely injured as a passenger in a vehicle. His life has never been the same. When it became clear that the insurance company was not going to pay him anything close to what is due, Alaska's top trial attorney Mark Choate called upon Rowley to serve as lead trial counsel. He has since gone on to win that case. Calls such as this are the norm rather than the exception for Rowley as he receives a similar request virtually every day of the week. If he had enough time Rowley would try them all.

"It's reached the point where I can go in and pick and choose those cases which suit my skillset and where I know I can go in and win big," he says. "But what defines me as a real trial lawyer and makes me different, is that I try difficult cases more often than I do the cases that I know will go big. I don't just take the easy or popular cases, I take the very tough and unpopular ones as well."

Rowley does pro bono work as a criminal defense lawyer on select cases where the accused is wrongfully accused or being bullied by an over-zealous prosecutor. Rowley has never charged a penny for his criminal defense work.

When other lawyers say a case cannot be won in a particular county, Rowley charges forward rather than retreat in fear or intimidation. He won the largest medical malpractice verdict in the country over a five-year period for \$74.5 million. He represented a little girl with cerebral palsy and her parents. When asked about this young client, Rowley responded, "The case was heart wrenching. Sofia was a beautiful little girl stuck in a body that would never work. She will never be able to walk, talk or use the bathroom on her own. This is because of cerebral palsy that was caused by injury to Sofia's brain during the labor and delivery process. I was called upon to do the trial just weeks before it started because the physicians and hospital wouldn't offer Sofia or her family anything in settlement. We made history in San Luis Obispo on that case and changed the way medicine is practiced."

When asked to comment on the many additional large jury verdicts that have been covered by the press, Rowley's reply was simple and succinct. "Sometimes the smaller cases are just as important as the big ones. What might seem little to us, is really big to the person and family who are affected."

Author of a best-selling book, "Trial By Human," and video series "Connecting With The Jury," Rowley shares his techniques and unique approach to jury trials to help other lawyers become better and build the confidence to stand in front of juries and fight for what they believe in.

So how does he win when everyone is saying it's impossible? What makes Rowley so different that he can succeed, where so many have failed?

"The first thing I do is work hard to truly and deeply care about the humans who I am representing. I make it personal," he says. "In law school, the professors say not to take anything personal. I disagreed with that from the very beginning. As a medic I took my job very personal because failure to do so could mean death versus life. I believe that I have been put on this earth for a reason. I have a job to do. That job is standing up for other humans, and being their voice because they are unable. When I'm fighting for these people who I care about, it's life or death for me."