THANK YOU

When I first found out that I won this award for activism, I thought that there was a mistake. I thought that activists are well-known and on TV giving interviews and press conferences. I had no clue on how I am considered an activist; after all, activists campaign to bring about improvements in society, applying different methods to solve practical problems in society. I considered the people I worked with from COSH, USMWF, OSHA, United Steelworkers and other organizations to be activists, not me. I was just a guy who got silicosis on my job. My journey, which thank God, isn’t over, wasn’t like a campaign where a candidate rolls into town, speaks, gets applause, cheers and votes then moves on to the next town. My first pulmonary specialist looked at my CT scan film 30 seconds into my initial appointment and said, “Oh my God! You’ve got silicosis!!” Writing it down was a different matter though, as he ‘did not want to get involved’ in my case. My comp case got dismissed and later when I asked him when he would, if ever, write silicosis down as his diagnosis, he printed a form out with the silicosis diagnosis on it and told me to never come back to his office. I found another doctor in Syracuse, about 150 miles away from Buffalo. So I had to drive 300 miles round trip to see a doctor and still do. However, this doctor got in touch with Peter Dooley and that started my speaking up about silicosis and worker safety. But could I be an activist?

Actually I am still the guy who got silicosis on my job; however I realize from coming here that not only am I an activist, but no matter how ugly I think my situation is, no matter how unknown I think my story is, just because I haven’t ‘won’ or got comfort out of my situation yet there is no reason for me to accept defeat. I never knew that so many people had a shared interest in safety for workers until I set foot in this conference. This is awesome! Imagine those that couldn’t get here because of scheduling conflicts or other reasons. Think about how much more unsafe workplaces are if we gave up. About a year ago, my, I mean, our Secretary of Labor, Director of OSHA and others in government service left their positions. I thought it was a tremendous blow to workplace safety yet I know for a fact that there are still good people in government service and elsewhere so I made the decision to not quit speaking up about workplace safety. I thank several people that I look to as examples in fighting the fight for workplace safety and I hope than I am an example to others to speak up or to continue speaking up. Attending this conference, hearing these stories and being here tonight before you, honored with this award, shows me this is about right versus wrong. How can you have someone tell a worker, “This is the best place to get hurt”? How can is it right for a company or industry to have a ‘cost of life’ list? These and other examples of egregious violations of basic consideration of employees are wrong and beg to get corrected. This is why we all must continue speaking up for workplace safety and show others how to as well. Thank you.