What a humbling honor to receive the ABA award for my pro bono work, work that has been so gratifying to me both personally and professionally. Indeed, receiving an award for pro bono service is superfluous because, as the many attorneys who do pro bono know, the work in and of itself is the reward.

As pro bono chair at Sheppard Mullin Richter & Hampton LLP, part of my role is to encourage all attorneys to take on pro bono matters. Extolling the many benefits of doing pro bono is really very easy because pro bono presents attorneys with such amazing opportunities, and no attorney should deprive him or herself of these invaluable professional and personal experiences. For example, pro bono has provided me with more than one experience of a lifetime. Here are just a few.

I will never forget standing at the finish line of the New York Marathon the year after settling my first pro bono case that sought equality for wheelchair athletes in the largest spectator event in the world. Nor will I ever forget the moment when I received an email informing me that my first asylum client, a refugee from the Sudan who was persecuted and tortured because of his human rights work in that country, would be permitted to remain in the U.S. I get goose bumps just thinking about that moment, and other similar moments, for our asylum clients. I will also never forget walking into the courtroom for trial on behalf of all people with disabilities in New York City seeking equal treatment in the City’s emergency programs and services. There I was, fighting the good fight for an issue that couldn’t be more important in a dramatic trial that included testimony from people with disabilities recounting harrowing details of their experiences trying to stay alive, or find shelter or transportation, during Hurricanes Irene and Sandy.

Pro bono has also allowed me the opportunity to work with people whom I admire greatly. I have had the privilege to litigate with legendary lawyers like Sid Wolinsky of Disability Rights Advocates, and work with many brilliant attorneys and advocates from Human Rights First and other legal service organizations and advocacy groups, such as Susan Dooha of the Center for Independence of the Disabled, New York. These individuals and so many others who have dedicated their professional careers to public service are the ones truly deserving of recognition.

I love to litigate, and I think I’m pretty good at it. Pro bono has allowed me to challenge myself and become a better litigator, litigating issues that cover a wide a variety of subjects, often involving cutting edge or novel legal theories. As Sid has said: “Litigation is a very intense experience, and when done on behalf of a good cause, it’s one of the most satisfying professional things a lawyer can do.” I couldn’t agree more, and that is why I am especially proud to be recognized for my disability related work in the same week as the 25th anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act. My brother is a quadriplegic and was one of my first pro bono clients in the marathon case. I am proud to fight for the civil rights of my brother and all persons with disabilities.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, my pro bono work has allowed me to represent clients who are such heroes that it is truly an honor to call myself their attorney. Thank you for the privilege of allowing me to represent each of you. Your daily struggles, commitment to justice, and fierce advocacy are awe-inspiring.

Thank you to the ABA and the Standing Committee on Pro Bono and Public Service for promoting one of the noblest aspects of our profession. I also want thank the many attorneys at Sheppard Mullin who regularly undertake pro bono work and our Chairman, Guy Halgren, for his leadership and direction. Sheppard Mullin attorneys continue to save lives, create new families with their adoption work, and help so many other people in need. It is an honor to be part of a firm with a culture that promotes giving back. I also want to say thank you to my parents who continue to be models of community service and inspired me to “do good.”

It is both a privilege and a professional obligation to volunteer to represent those in need. Whether it’s a complicated case or just giving guidance when it is needed most, I encourage all attorneys to take on a pro bono case, because doing pro bono will make you a better lawyer and – more importantly – a better person.