



books]

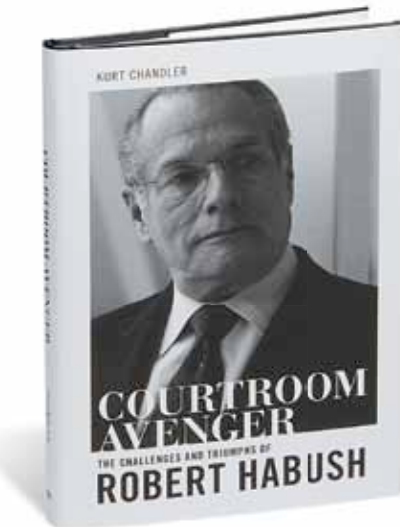
Fighting the Good Fight

The title is an appropriate moniker for master litigator Robert Habush: In *Courtroom Avenger*, Kurt Chandler highlights Habush's many successes and the roadblocks he overcame along the way. He explains how Habush channeled his frustration with his personal experiences—from anti-Semitism, to his daughter's devastating vaccination injury, to a lack of affection from his lawyer father—into a heated vengeance directed at those who negligently harm others.

Habush largely focused on products liability cases before such claims were mainstream, laying the groundwork for our current ability to hold accountable companies that disregard worker and consumer safety. He was among the first trial lawyers to engage in political activism as president of the American Association for Justice—then the Association of Trial Lawyers of America—from 1986 to 1987.

Habush has mastered the art of storytelling—presenting his clients' stories to the jury and proving the facts to support the necessary elements of their claims. In this biography, Chandler, the editor of *Milwaukee Magazine* and a newspaper reporter, gives readers a birds-eye view of the formulaic method Habush would use to decide whether to accept a case—and then how he would prepare it for trial and win.

Chandler doesn't spell out trial tactics in a simple list; instead, he uses Habush's success stories to illustrate best practices, including working on whatever cases



Courtroom Avenger: The Challenges and Triumphs of Robert Habush


Kurt Chandler
ABA Book Publishing
www.americanbar.org
276 pp., \$39.95
Reviewed by Stacey E. Burke

come your way so that you can learn, getting a workers' compensation insurance carrier to work with you (because your objectives are often harmonious), finding the best experts on a case-by-case basis, and giving a passionate closing argument. The book also emphasizes the concept of being inwardly self-critical and a perfectionist while outwardly portraying stalwart confidence in court—something all lawyers can relate to.

The average nonlawyer reader might consider it a small drawback that the proportion of trial stories and trial

transcript excerpts to other information is somewhat unbalanced. While each of Habush's clients, cases, and trials is noteworthy, a nonlawyer can only read so many war stories in a row. Still, his landmark cases are many: HIV-tainted blood being transfused into healthy patients; products liability claims against automakers for seat collapse, lack of shoulder straps in back-seat seat belts, and inadequate child restraints; and acting as special counsel on Wisconsin's behalf against tobacco companies.

As a mother, reading Habush's story about how his daughter suffered irreparable brain damage from a vaccination as an infant was heart-wrenching. At the beginning of his legal career, he was a client in a products liability case against Parke-Davis regarding the Quadrigen vaccine, and it was a turning point. This horrible personal experience led him to become one of the most successful trial lawyers in U.S. legal history.

Such personal flourishes and details of Habush's personal life, lifelong political activism, and philanthropic endeavors make *Courtroom Avenger* a quick and enjoyable read for almost any lawyer in the mood for renewed inspiration to keep fighting the good fight. The book also showcases the best of why trial lawyers do what we do and will serve as a solid counterargument to tort "reform" for years to come. 

Stacey E. Burke is a trial lawyer consulting for law firms through her own business headquartered in Houston.