



## Who is the toughest person you know?

We can all think of someone — someone famous and someone not so famous — be it a friend, a family member, a professional colleague, or a sports hero.

For me, two come to mind. The famous one, Dan Gable, lost only one match in his entire high school and collegiate career — his last — and

won a gold medal at the 1972 Olympics, while not giving up a single point.

The other one is not so famous. He was born on a Friday, six weeks early. His father was not there. He was traveling out of town. When his father arrived at the hospital, the first person to greet him on a quiet and dimly lit hospital floor was a Catholic priest. The doctors said the infant would not live four hours. When he did, they said he would not live the weekend.

He was in the pediatric intensive care unit on a ventilator. Due to his critical condition, he was transported to the specialists at the University of Iowa Hospitals and Clinics. The doctors said he would eventually need an organ transplant to survive.

On the sixth day of his life, he had a cardiac arrest. He was brought back to life by the physicians at the U of I. He spent many months in Iowa City in the pediatric intensive care unit. His mother drove from Des Moines to Iowa City and back each

day. On the weekends, his father would come, sometimes riding with his buddies who were headed to Kinnick Stadium for Iowa football.

His father would hold him on the weekends. His mother would hold him during the week.

He would eventually return to Des Moines, but would spend time in the intensive care unit. When he was strong enough, he was able to come home. He was kept alive on a feeding tube inserted through his nose. He would be on the feeding tube for the next two years.

When he was 17 months old, the doctors determined he was ready for

a transplant. His father donated his left kidney for the transplant. The surgery was conducted by famed Minnesota surgeon, Dr. John Najarian, who performed the operation on both.

The organ transplant was a success. He took a daily regimen of pills to prevent rejection. As he grew stronger he pursued his innate love of all sports, particularly baseball, and played hard. He never complained.

When he was in kindergarten at Greenwood Elementary in Des Moines, he began to reject his father's kidney. By six he was on dialysis to stay alive. He had a line in his chest implanted to allow access by the dialysis equipment to clean his blood for four

hours, three times a week. He never complained.

Even though the young boy had a line surgically implanted in his chest, it did not stop him from playing baseball. When he was on dialysis he spent the hours watching the Chicago Cubs and sometimes the Atlanta Braves. The many hours in the dialysis chair watching baseball allowed him to acquire knowledge of the game far beyond his years. The young lad continued on dialysis for almost two years. He never complained.

Just after his eighth birthday he won the organ lottery. A match was found for him for a second organ transplant. An organ was donated by a young man who had been killed in an accident in Minnesota.

The second organ transplant was a success. With all organ transplants, however, the process was not a cure, but a form of treatment for the illness the boy had been born with, polycystic kidney disease.

For the next 10 years, he continued to play baseball and live life to the fullest. He had one speed — full throttle. He took up wrestling in high school, a sport he would eventually compete in at the varsity level and letter in. He was also a member of the Guts Club, limited to those team members who had never missed a practice. Throughout the years he continued to take his daily anti-rejection medicines and other pills, more than 22 pills a day. He never complained.

During his senior year of high school he began to reject the second transplanted organ and by March of his senior year he was being kept alive on dialysis — four-to-five hours a day, three days a week. He would eventually take the special training to do home dialysis. A dialysis machine was outfitted in his room with electricity and plumbing. He dialyzed every day in his bedroom. Each session he would put in the large two needles in his leg himself to connect his body to the machine. He remained on dialysis with the prospect it would be the nature of his life. He



**John Cook, founder of Guts Gear Foundation dedicated to bringing public awareness of renal failure in children and supplying educational and recreational materials to children during dialysis.**  
[www.thegutsgearfoundation.org](http://www.thegutsgearfoundation.org)



**Wrestling legend, Dan Gable, was one of the most dominant competitors and coaches in wrestling history. He is best known for his tenure as head coach at the University of Iowa where he won 16 NCAA team titles from 1976–1997.**



John Cook checking in at the wrestling table before a wrestling match at Theodore Roosevelt High School in Des Moines in 2011.

never complained. While on dialysis he saw the need to bring public awareness to children with renal failure. He began building the framework for a non-profit foundation. His goal was to bring awareness to children on dialysis and to provide them with entertainment and educational material while they were on dialysis and see that

this was spread to dialysis centers throughout the United States. He formed a foundation called TheGutsGearFoundation.org.

In July of 2012, after nearly 16 months on dialysis, incredibly and improbably he won the organ lottery again. He would receive an unprecedented third organ transplant.

The organ came from California. The donor gave away all the organs he could, except his other kidney. That kidney had a cancerous lesion and was not suitable for donation.

Just before the third organ transplant surgery was to begin, the doctors notified the young man the organ he was to receive also had a cancerous lesion, but that it had been removed. The doctors asked the young man if he wished to proceed with the transplant nevertheless. He thought about it only briefly, before telling the doctors “we have a deal.”

The third organ transplant was successful. The transplant was not quite the same as the two before, however. His energy never raised to the level of what he had experienced from the previous organ transplants. Nevertheless, he was not on dialysis and went about his life as best he could.

About seven months after his third transplant, his lab work indicated he had a virus. The virus had come with the organ that had been transplanted. The virus was called CMV. It is treated with a strong medicine. Unfortunately, the young man’s body was resistant to the medicine that would treat this virus. The virus continued to grow in his body.

During this time he secured the job of his lifetime, bat boy for the Iowa Cubs. It was a job he loved. As the virus continued to grow, however, his strength wore down. He never complained.

Eventually, the doctors chose to see if an experimental drug would help turn back the growing virus. As the July 4th holiday was approaching, the young man finished his work at the Iowa Cubs and went to Chicago for a planned trip to see the Chicago

**“Gold medals aren’t really made of gold. They’re made of sweat, determination, and a hard-to-find alloy called guts.”**

**– Dan Gable**

Cubs play at Wrigley Field on July 6 and 7. He made the trip, and the Cubs won both games!

On the following Monday, July 8, he was to travel to Minnesota and begin his experimental drug treatment. When he arrived, the doctors said he was too sick to leave, but they would nevertheless begin the drug treatment. Within a few days, however, his condition worsened. He was transferred to the intensive care unit and was put on a ventilator the third day of his hospitalization. He remained on the ventilator struggling to stay alive until the virus finally took over. He died 11 days later, on July 21, 2013. He never complained.

The young man I have described, the toughest person I have ever known, was John R. Cook. He was my son.



John on his final ride at Catalina State Park near Tucson, Ariz., in the spring of 2013.

### What is toughness?

The question got me thinking about what makes a truly tough lawyer.

Regrettably, many lay people and even some lawyers think toughness as a lawyer is akin to being mean, malicious, unreasonable, obstructive, unaccommodating — the “junkyard dog” comes to mind.

True toughness as a lawyer is none of those things. A tough lawyer is confident, passionate

and persistent. Most important is persistence. Indeed, it is perseverance and passion to achieve a goal that defines toughness for me.

Truly tough lawyers have a clear goal they work towards. They don’t let short-term failures or negative feedback stop them from continuing the march toward their goal. Tough lawyers work on a schedule, not just when they feel motivated.

Motivation is fickle. Will-power comes and goes. But toughness isn’t about getting an incredible dose of inspiration or courage. It’s about building the daily habits that allow a person to stick to a schedule and overcome challenges and distractions over and over again. Tough people don’t have to be more courageous, more talented, or more intelligent, just more consistent.



Dan Gable and John at the 2013 NCAA National Wrestling Tournament in Des Moines.

Toughness isn't about bravado or being meanspirited. It is about meeting challenges head-on and not shrinking from them. It's about sticking to your values. It's about honesty.

Research has shown that mental toughness — or “grit,” as it is sometimes called — plays a far more important role than anything else in achieving one's goals. That's good news, since none of us can do much about the genes we were born with, but we can all do a lot to improve mental toughness.

So in a word, toughness is perseverance.

The next time someone says “I want a really tough lawyer” or “Do you know a ‘tough lawyer’?” answer them by saying “Do you mean someone with perseverance, passion and grit?”

I'm sure in my own journey, I have fallen short many times on the standard of toughness I have described and expect of myself.

But when we get knocked down we should all strive to be tough enough to get up and keep fighting. The tough lawyer knows how to overcome the inevitability of obstacles and adversity. We can all be tougher and we can be tougher together.

### Presidential roundup

As I reflect upon my year as president of the oldest voluntary bar association in the country, I must thank all those who have come before me in this great organization. Specifically, I wish to thank Bob Waterman and Cindy Moser who held this post before me. They were great supporters and provided guidance for me as I took the gavel. I also want to thank the fine bar staff of the ISBA. Executive Director Dwight Dinkla, Assistant Executive Director Harry Shipley, and Communications Director Steve

Boeckman are outstanding. As I have said many times at the bar office, the ISBA outperforms its assets.

I would be remiss if I did not also thank the person I have referred to frequently as “the keeper of the flame,” Dr. David L. Brown, Esq. David has provided invaluable counsel and advice during my term as president. I also want to thank my family and my firm for giving me this opportunity. It is one I will never forget.

Among the successes we can count in the past year as a bar are the improved public outreach of the ISBA, the work of the Blue Ribbon Committee on Legal Education and Licensure, the return of luster to our annual meeting, and advancements in technology and the digital law office, just to name a few.

It has been my great privilege and honor to serve as your 127th Iowa State Bar Association president. I cannot thank all of you enough for this experience.

Best wishes to Joe Feller of Sibley, our new ISBA president. I am confident Joe will be a great leader of our organization.

As always, feel free to reach out to me at any time with any comments, complaints, or suggestions. I welcome them. My email: [gcook@grefesidney.com](mailto:gcook@grefesidney.com).

Best regards,

Guy R. Cook



## Keeping it simple.

Only in Iowa can you be part of a unique partnership like Title Guaranty. Our attorney/abstractor system brings together local resources for a simple, affordable and secure system. And all excess revenue helps first time Iowa homebuyers.

Only in Iowa — and only  
with Title Guaranty.



**TITLE GUARANTY**

800-432-7230 • 515-725-4900  
[www.iowatitleguaranty.gov](http://www.iowatitleguaranty.gov)