

# THE NORTHWESTERN COLUMNS

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## Risk pays off for Bouslough

*Representative achieves Top 20 recognition for first time*

It was daunting for **Laura A. Bouslough** to consider leaving her job in the home office to take a position in the field – especially as a single mother with a young son. But for Bouslough, financial representative with The Schwertfeger Financial Group in East Troy, Wis., the risk had its rewards. Bouslough achieved Top 20 recognition this year, with \$1.1 million in premium and 54.65 lives.

Bouslough originally worked in the home office, planning field staff seminars across the country, where she traveled extensively and met many financial representatives. One day, a financial representative called and said he was looking for a new assistant and asked if she knew anyone. As she scrolled down her list of candidates, the representative asked, “What about you?” It was **Douglas M. MacNeil, CLU, ChFC**, now a senior financial representative with The Schwertfeger Financial Group and a Top 20 representative himself.

Bouslough resisted. “I said no at first,” she recalled. “I thought he was nuts. I had this great job. Why would I leave? Doug assured me there was opportunity for me in the field.” So she took the leap of faith.

“I was a single mom with a child in private school and a home with a mortgage to pay,” Bouslough said. “It was a big risk, but I’m glad I took it.”

She went to work with MacNeil as



Financial Representative **Laura A. Bouslough** enjoys a moment with the newest member of her family, **Sophie**. Bouslough credits her family, husband **Jeff** and son **Chris**, with their support during her road to achieving Top 20 recognition.

his assistant, eventually becoming his business partner. One day, while working on a large case, she drove to meet with an out-of-town client to complete some paperwork and pick up a large premium check. “She gave me a big hug and a kiss, as well as the check,” Bouslough said. “I kicked myself over and over the whole drive home. It was my own fault for not becoming a financial representative sooner. The next day, I signed my contract because I realized I could do this. In fact – I had just done this.”

As her mentor, MacNeil had encouraged Bouslough to become a representative many years earlier, but she resisted. “I

was terrified about giving up my salary and working only on commission,” she said. “Fear is a great motivator, but it can be a great inhibitor too. Once I saw that large case get approved, I was determined to make the change. I understand working on commission is a big obstacle for many people, especially for women who are financially supporting their families.”

### Competitive edge

Though Bouslough doesn’t focus too heavily on the fact that she is a top-producing female in the career, she did admit to feeling slightly overwhelmed when walking on stage in Chicago at the 2007 Central Regional Meeting.

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“I walked on stage and it was the first time a woman had done that (achieved Top 10 status in the Central Region). A lot of women were coming up to me and were inspired,” Bouslough said. “I didn’t realize that so much responsibility comes with that accomplishment.”

Besides, Bouslough has never felt disadvantaged by being a female in this industry. In fact, she feels it gives her a competitive edge. “There aren’t a lot of women in this business,” Bouslough said. “When I walk into a client meeting, I am oftentimes the only female. I bring a different point of view, a different perspective. I see and approach things differently...women are very intuitive.”

And though it may take that extra moment to establish credibility, “Once I’m able to prove that this is what I do and I do it well – it becomes a level playing field,” said Bouslough.

#### **Triumph over tribulation**

In the midst of growing her career, Bouslough received some medical news that would significantly affect her future. In September 2005, she was diagnosed with an inoperable tumor in the center of her spinal cord. Wanting to brush it off, she regularly went to visit neurosurgeons and ignored the reality of the situation until one doctor said to her, “You’re not getting how big of a deal this is, are you?”

After pointing out that the tumor was located in the center of her spinal cord at the C7 vertebrae, which controls movement from the neck down, the doctors told her they couldn’t even believe she had walked into that day’s appointment. “That’s when I finally got it – how big this is going to be. To the extent the

tumor grows, at some point, I’m not going to be able to walk or use my arms,” Bouslough said.

Not wanting to give up her career, Bouslough maintained high-level production and learned to work around doctor appointments, eventually finding a routine that worked for her. Because of the overwhelming information she often took in during her doctor’s appointments, Bouslough found it difficult to meet with clients on the same days as neurology consultations.

“I needed to focus on my health, but I had these client meetings set up that I wasn’t about to miss,” Bouslough said. “One day, my doctor said to me, ‘Listen – you can’t control this. You have to accept the fact that the tumor may grow, it may stay the same. So do what you want to do.’” From that day forward, she decided not to worry about what she could not change, and instead focus on what she needed to do for her health, her family and her career.

Bouslough will admit her experience gives her a different mindset when she goes into prospective client meetings. “I don’t bring up my situation, but I know first-hand that insurability is a fickle thing. It does give me a sense of urgency for me to work with my clients to prepare for their future, and for me to do as much as I can now,” she said.

#### **Mind over matter**

Did walking the stage at Central Regional Meeting prepare her for walking at Annual Meeting? Perhaps, but Bouslough feels very grateful just to be walking. “Bill [Beckley, CLU, ChFC, MSFS, executive vice president – agencies] was very kind to me,” she said. “I’m certain

I was the first financial representative in the central region Top 10 he ever kissed! He motioned for me to look out into the crowd. Everybody was standing and clapping; I was very humbled by that. I felt a little overwhelmed and very undeserving,” Bouslough said.

But she says anyone can get there. “I was one of those people who sat in the audience and watched Doug on stage, so I knew that it took a lot of hard work and high premium. There is a part of you that thinks that you’ll never be able to do that,” Bouslough said. “But you have to find that other part that says: just try. You have to listen to that voice and drown out the part of you that doesn’t want to believe.”

#### **A year of celebration**

The celebration at Annual Meeting will be a little sweeter this year as well because Bouslough will have her husband **Jeff** by her side and her now-grown son, **Chris**, cheering her on in the audience. “When I think back on it, Chris is the one who sacrificed while I worked long hours in preparation for this,” Bouslough said. “Now it’s Jeff who supports me and puts up with my schedule.”

Plus, she gets to reconnect with colleagues from the field and the home office during this monumental year. “To achieve Top 20 recognition and to have it happen in the 150th anniversary year is very special. It comes with a great level of responsibility for me to continue to work hard.

“The people on stage are real people with good discipline and a strong work ethic,” Bouslough said. “I’m just a small-town girl who is living proof that it can be done.”