

I met Jonathan on October 6, 1978. It was at our first meeting as newly appointed members of the Policy Committee of the NYS Coalition for Criminal Justice. I was working for a small, church-based not-for-profit doing court-watching, managing a revolving bail fund and writing grants to get a work release program in the Rensselaer county jail. Jonathan was getting the NYS Defenders Association on its feet in a small office in Mineola with a handful of VISTA volunteers and his mother as his administrative assistant. Six months later we were dating. I was also in the process of buying a house in Troy. I thought, “Hey, I’m dating a lawyer”, and I suggesting he could represent me at the closing. He did not hesitate. He immediately offered to pay a lawyer to represent me at the closing.

Jonathan was not “a Lawyer’s Lawyer”. He never fashioned himself as Clarence Darrow but more like George Bailey. Because Jonathan cannot be here to accept this award, I want to share three stories about his life to give you some sense of who he was.

The first story is about another Diane. Jonathan was a camper and then counselor at Pinecrest Dunes Camp on Long Island. One year, prior to the regular campers arriving for the summer, a group of campers sponsored by some group, Rotary or whatever arrived for a one week stay. Among the campers was a young girl named Diane. During that week he got to know her and care about her. Jonathan took his counselor salary for that summer and donated it so she could attend camp for the whole summer. He later learned that she had been a victim of physical and sexual abuse throughout her childhood. He remained close to her for the rest of her life as she sank into mental illness. When she died some 30 years later, it was Jonathan’s name that she left as her final contact.

The second story involves Jonathan’s tenacity and his love for investigation. This is a great story that ought to be savored over gin and tonics – Jonathan’s favorite drink. In 2005, our oldest son, Ben was graduating from college and he treated himself to his first cell phone. He was required to produce his driver’s license and in the process, his

identity was stolen and was later used to obtain a motorcycle from a dealership in Schenectady County. Ben was called in for questioning and the police were quickly convinced that he was not the thief. Jonathan spoke with the detectives and suggested that this might be “an inside job”. They agreed and promptly suspected that Ben’s brother, Michael might be responsible. Then they arrested one of Michael’s college roommates and charged him with the theft of the motorcycle. We were horrified. Michael’s roommate’s parents had to hire an attorney to represent their son who was majoring in education and about to begin his student teaching - where they fingerprint you and check your criminal history. The clock was ticking.

Jonathan investigated the hell out of this case. Meanwhile, the motorcycle ended up in Florida involved in a crash. Jonathan tracked down the identity thief, Jamie, spoke with him and explained that his primary concern was further adverse exposure for Ben. And in the end, Jamie, with Jonathan’s intervention, walked away with probation and Jonathan got him to participate in a restorative justice session.

Finally, there is Calvin who is serving 20 to life in Sing Sing. Jonathan had known Calvin since he was a teenager. He was born in Haiti and was brought to this country by his mother. As a result of abuse and neglect, she eventually lost custody of him and Calvin was raised in a series of state and county run homes – all of which neglected to obtain a green card or citizenship for him. Eventually he found himself in the criminal justice system. In addition to overseeing his defense, Jonathan became like a father to him, taking his weekly calls, encouraging him to get his GED and to participate in programs available to him. When Jonathan retired in 2017, he made sure that Calvin had excellent counsel as he approached parole and probable deportation. When he learned he was sick at the end of August, he worried what would happen to Calvin. He needed to find someone who would become Jonathan to Calvin. He asked an attorney friend if he would be willing to take on that role. And when his friend responded that he would be honored to, it was the only time Jonathan cried during his illness.

Jonathan did not wear “lawyer” like a suit of armor, but it was totally woven into the fabric of his being. It informed his sense of justice and how he spoke truth to power.

Jonathan has received many wonderful tributes. Assemblyman Joe Lentol, chair of the Assembly Codes committee in his law review article, called him the Patron Saint of Public Defenders. Jonathan would have chuckled at that. He worked tirelessly for 39 years at the Defenders Association to ensure that every person received the best legal representation. In the end, his entire life was devoted to one goal – setting the captives free.