

In Memoriam: *Jeffrey P. Weinstein, 1945-2022* Family Lawyer Extraordinaire

By Mark Sobel

Jeffrey P. Weinstein spent most of his professional career as a well-respected family lawyer. He earned that respect. He worked every day... even during the most difficult last five years of his life when he refused to compromise living life to its fullest. To Jeff, his diagnosis was an annoyance. He never complained.

Jeff served as a matrimonial lawyer for more than 50 years and was a principal at Weinstein Family Law, a practice engaged in complex family matters. Jeff not only served his clients well, he served our profession well. He enhanced the practice of family law through his generous devotion of time and effort. Among a few of Jeff's volunteering efforts were his decades of memberships in the Essex County Bar Association, the New Jersey Bar Association and the American Bar Association. Given his particular focus, Jeff was a member for many years of the New Jersey State Bar Association Family Law Section and, in fact, served as the Chair of that Section. He also was one of only two lawyers in New Jersey who provided guidance to the New Jersey Supreme Court Committee establishing the family part within the New Jersey Court system. Jeff was a fellow of both the American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers and the International Academy of Family Lawyers.

Jeff believed in the principle that everyone was entitled to advance themselves to their full potential. Long before it was common, his law firm's counsel included women, minorities, and staff from all different walks of life. They were all an integral part of his firm. Visits to Jeff's office would often remind me of what it might be like to be in the U.N. with so many different people in a mosaic of complete acceptance based upon only two attributes: integrity and a commitment to hard work.

Unlike many of us, Jeff never sought self-promotion. In fact, he was reluctant to talk about his many successes, zealously guarding his clients' privacy. Thus, many of you may not know, that Jeff was the lawyer who represented Peter O'Toole in an international custody case. That case in Monmouth County occurred at a time when sexual

stereotypes may not have allowed for a father's equal legal rights regarding custody of children. It certainly was a time when removing a child from the United States to live in England was not an easily accomplished task. Jeff won that case but he never bragged about it. He just indicated that the real benefactor was Mr. O'Toole's son, who got the opportunity to live a life that allowed him to accomplish whatever his God-given talents were. Similarly, Jeff was, I believe, the first lawyer in New Jersey to obtain alimony for a husband. Again, not an easy accomplishment back in the day. However, Jeff's body of work is not about his many legal accomplishments nor about his legal acumen, but rather his undying devotion to the practice of law in New Jersey. His true legacy is about teaching the lawyers of the next generation. As a result, I was privileged for over 25 years to work with Jeff on our annual two-day emersion in family law attended by hundreds of lawyers throughout the state.

Our ICLE Family Law program certainly was one of Jeff's finest accomplishments. As a result of that program, I had the profound opportunity to work many days and nights with Jeff for over a quarter of a century. Yes, we discussed the evolution of family law and bringing in experts to assist in the analysis of the ever-evolving aspects of our practice. Our topics ranged from business valuations, removal issues (pre- and post-*Baures*) as well as the practical needs of starting your own practice, building your own client base, and dealing with the variety of personalities one often finds within the rubric of family law. While it is true that many of our lunch sessions at Neros discussed outlines for that year's topics we would digress into an elaborate discussion of the Yankees starting lineup or the Giants beating the Patriots. It was a time for me to learn. It was a time I will never forget.

When we were informed of Jeff's tragic passing and, given the upcoming Jewish high holidays and the necessity for an immediate service, I wondered if in fact many of his family, friends and colleagues would be able to attend on such short notice. I should not have been

surprised in seeing the entire chapel full, the entire parking lot full and hundreds of people in attendance on literally no notice. That perhaps is the best illustration of Jeff's legacy. He touched all of us and did so in a way that we all dropped everything to be there to celebrate his tremendous accomplishments with his family. When I got there, both his son, Evan, and his wife, Ronnie, whispered to me that I guess now I will have to do it alone. In truth, I will never be doing the Institute alone, as Jeff will be on my shoulder every moment of that program, often telling me to stop talking and let the speakers get a word in. I will miss him every day but especially on those summer days. For years, after the passing of one of my other mentors, Barry Croland, I refused and still refuse to take his number off my speed dial. Just seeing his name there puts a smile on my face. Unfortunately, now I have two names on that speed dial list, Barry's and Jeff's. Perhaps the greatest lesson Jeff taught me was that if you are true to your profession, you will not need to send, nor will you need to receive, a confirming letter regarding the conversation you just had with an adversary. I never did with Jeff. I never needed one. What a legacy. ■