



July 28, 2016

Dan Ruben
Executive Director
Equal Justice America
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Dear Dan,

It is widely known that the summer going into the final year of law school is extremely important for a law student setting up a career path in the legal field. This summer - working full-time with Greater Boston Legal Services ("GBLS") - has definitely solidified my desire to work in public interest law.

There are many reasons to explain why my summer at GBLS was inspiring: my colleagues working there, the exposure to important issues of social justice, and the time spent in the Boston Housing Court. However, the most important reason why this job was inspiring was because of the clients that I had the privilege of serving.

The first client that I was able to assist is C.B. She is the oldest and only girl out of thirteen siblings. She has a past history of drug abuse and bad behavior but decided years ago to try and turn her life around. She now attends Church. She has to use a walker to get around but doesn't let that discourage her. C.B. is a great cook and has learned most of her recipes from her mom and grandmother. She is a sweet woman being harassed by a step son who was born out of wedlock unbeknownst to her. She has a big heart which got her into the eviction case in the first place because she continues to allow her step son to enter her unit under the assumption that he will behave. The landlord has been reasonable in giving C.B. the opportunity to search for alternative housing before throwing her back into a shelter. C.B. cannot get housing in Boston immediately because the waitlist for housing in Boston is over two years.

I was able to connect C.B. with Boston City Hall's Elderly Commission, which is working to search for another apartment for her. More than this, I gave C.B. my time. She lives alone and is physically disabled. I tried to call her once every weekend to check in on her. She even called me on July Fourth to wish my family good blessings. I look forward to keeping in touch with C.B. and encouraging her as the housing search unfolds.

I also had the opportunity to meet a 92 year old veteran of WWII named J.M. He is a wicked outgoing man who is not afraid to tell you a story or his opinion on any particular topic. He grew up in Boston and went to school in New Hampshire. He joined the Army air-force and trained as a paratrooper. J.M. is distrustful of the system because he has been tossed around from agency to agency. In preparation for my first home visit, I read the reports about him. Most of the reports described a grumpy, aggressive old

man. The first meeting with J.M. lasted two hours and it wasn't because he harassed me relentlessly. It was because of the amazing, detailed stories that he told me; stories of his youth and of WWII. Every story was guaranteed to have a message meant to impart some wisdom for me.

J.M. is one of the sharpest individuals I have had the pleasure of meeting. He is proof that somebody shouldn't be judged on the surface based on reports and documentation. People are much more than what they seem like on paper. They are more than rent-paying tenants too. J.M. is currently being evicted from his unit. He was initially not granted eligibility to the HUD VASH program because one of the criteria for the program is that a person become "McKinley homeless" before receiving any assistance. Given his age and physical disability, I was able to successfully argue for an exception of this policy. While I have an "official" final day, I cannot end my time at GBLS until I watch J.M. move into the brand new VA apartment that I was able to secure for him.

There were many more individuals that I was blessed to have been able to meet during my summer serving at GBLS. Each with their own disheartening story. But each having the capacity to transcend into a story of hope and happiness. The judicial system and our government are very complicated bodies to navigate, especially for those who have not been educated or are disabled. I helped serve as an advocate for the individuals who had difficulty with this navigation.

While the issues of homelessness and affordable housing stir political debate and conversation, these issues are also deeply affecting the lives of everyday individuals and families. It brings me happiness knowing that organizations like GBLS are protecting our most vulnerable until politics in this country can remedy the issues.

This experience would not have been possible with the financial assistance of the Equal Justice America Fellowship. I cannot thank you and your organization enough!

Thankfully,

Guy Sergi

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