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Recalling a sole practitioner; he gave to others and loved the law

Inevitably, attorneys who practice for any length of time experience the loss of colleagues along the way. With a large and active legal community, we do not always keep in touch and consequently may not learn of a fellow practitioner's illness or death until well after the fact.

We should make a point of remembering the contributions of departed lawyers who enhanced our profession through their work.

This column honors the memory of Jason Bruce, a sole practitioner who quietly passed away three years ago, at age 49. Jason was not a splashy lawyer or a headline seeker, but he practiced law with grit, devotion and generosity to clients, peers and community.

When Jason and I met as young associates at Jenner & Block, he had a Stanford Law Review pedigree, a great attitude and a strong work ethic. Although he enjoyed the large firm environment where he worked on complex bankruptcy matters, Jason always wanted his own practice. After several years he pursued his dream, setting up an office on 53rd Street in the heart of Hyde Park.

Passion for social justice

Jason flourished as a sole practitioner, and his career spanned more than two decades. Although he handled a steady complement of business matters, Jason often passed more lucrative opportunities to help "the little guy."

He was known to take cases with long odds and reduced financial incentive, because he felt his clients deserved equal treatment and were entitled to their day in court.

In service of persons in need, for example, Jason doggedly pursued civil rights and discrimina-

tion cases against large institutions. He also represented defendants in serious criminal cases, and in one instance, he won a reversal of a murder conviction based on procedural missteps at trial.

Jason was not afraid to go all the way for a client once he accepted a case, such as the time he took a modest city administrative judgment all the way to the appellate court.

Due to Jason's magnetic personality and his willingness to help, he became a well-known fixture in Hyde Park. His brother, James Bruce, recalls numerous strolls down 53rd Street, where passers-by would greet Jason as the "Mayor of Hyde Park" or simply the "Attorney."

Giving back to the legal community

Beyond helping clients, Jason took seriously his obligations to the legal profession. He was proud to serve on the Attorney Registration & Disciplinary Commis-

sion Hearing Board. He also taught trial advocacy to students at the Edwin F. Mandel Legal Aid Clinic at the University of Chicago Law School.

Jason additionally assisted up-and-coming attorneys, such as Deborah B. Cole, who formerly maintained her own practice in Hyde Park. Cole, now a veteran

SOLE SPEAK

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member of the estate planning group at Hoogendoorn & Talbot LLP, remembers Jason as "a very smart guy" who was "always willing to help."

Cole credits Jason with teaching her the importance of early and thorough case evaluation. Lis-

ciated the independence of a solo practice and also valued time spent with family.

Jason even supported other lawyers through software development. As a self-taught programmer, he developed two free smartphone apps that downloaded the Chicago landlord-tenant ordinance and the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure for on-the-spot use in court.

Helping the neighborhood, winding down

As a neighborhood activist, Jason seemingly was everywhere. He served as president of the Hyde Park Chamber of Commerce and helped organize a Hyde Park street festival. He also somehow found time to serve on the boards of the Hyde Park Co-Op, the Harper Court Foundation and the Blue Gargoyles Youth Service Center.

Jason was a private person and did not want other lawyers to know about his illness. He continued to operate his practice, without assistance, even though the work took its toll on his fragile health. "He went on by sheer strength of will," said his brother James, because "he felt he owed it to his clients and his family."

In Jason's off time, his brother remembers, he "enjoyed the simple pleasures," such as spending quality time with his wife and two sons, or having a good cup of coffee over a challenging game of chess at one of the many outdoor chessboards in Hyde Park.

He also was an avid reader and would gladly "debate any issue you wanted to take on." He made the most of his life, even when he knew his time was limited.

As we progress through our careers, it is important to keep selfless contributors like Jason Bruce in mind. He made a difference, and he is missed.

Jason (Bruce) was not afraid to go all the way for a client once he accepted a case, such as the time he took a modest city administrative judgment all the way to the appellate court.

ten to the client's version of events, he would say, but also make your own investigation, so that the client receives your best analysis based on the most accurate information.

Another acquaintance, Craig Truitt of Truitt, Brown & Truitt in Hyde Park, recalls Jason as a razor-sharp attorney who appre-