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LegalCURRENTS

An ode to my mentors, and their dedication

"Mentoring is a brain to pick, an ear to listen, and a push in the right direction."

— JOHN CROSBY

I've been giving a lot of thought lately to the value of mentors. When it comes to mentors, I've been extremely lucky. Throughout the course of my legal career, I have had invaluable mentors, without whom, I wouldn't be where I am — or who I am. It is to them that I dedicate this article.

First, there is Edward Menkin, a criminal defense attorney in Syracuse. It is because of Ed (a good friend of my parents) that I decided to attend law school in the first place.

His career fascinated me, and Ed encouraged me to learn more about it. When I was in college, I interned in his office and he assisted me in obtaining a summer internship with the U.S. Attorney's Office.

During law school, he provided me with one of my most memorable law school experiences when he allowed me to sit second chair during a federal prisoner civil rights case that he tried. Ed is one of the most dedicated and talented criminal defense attorneys that I know and I am proud to call him my first mentor.

After law school, I worked for four years at the Monroe County Public Defender's Office. There I met Clark Zimmermann, a seasoned PD, who became a lifelong friend and mentor.

Clark was a wonderful, patient, and wise mentor. Whenever I hit a wall and was unsure how to proceed with one of my cases, he never failed to point me in the right direction.

He and I left the PDs at approximately the same time and then worked together as associates at what is now Trevett, Cristo, Salzer and Andolina PC. There, we became good friends as we assisted each other in learning how to practice civil law — a new experience for both of us.

Another invaluable mentor is my cousin, David Rothenberg, one of the wisest people I know. When I moved to Rochester, he offered me his advice and guidance in obtaining my job at the PD's office.

A few years later, when I was ready to leave that position and was considering leaving the law altogether, he encouraged me to stick it out for a few more years and give civil litigation a try. I took his advice to heart and have never regretted doing so — my years as a civil litigator rounded out my legal experience and made me a much better lawyer.

And years later, after I took a brief, self-imposed hiatus from the legal field, I was explaining to him my intent to begin working as a contract attorney. David told me offhand, "You know the other day on NPR I heard about these things called "blogs." You should start one."

And, I did — yet another invaluable piece of advice from David, without which I wouldn't be where I am today.

While at Trevett, Cristo, Salzer & Andolina, Larry Andolina and Jim Gocker were wonderful mentors. Larry is a masterful criminal defense attorney and a skilled negotiator. He truly understands people — who they are and what motivates them. Every time he worked a room full of people, whether it was a pre-trial conference or a tense negotiation, I learned more from watching him than I did during all three years of law school.

Then, there was Jim. Jim taught me how to truly practice law — carefully, methodically and strategically — leaving no stone unturned.

I'll never forget walking into his office during the beginning of my time at the firm and asking him a question about a filing deadline. He paused, looked at me over his reading glasses, and said "Well, let's see what the CPLR has to say about that."

Years later, a new associate walked into my office, desperation in her eyes, and frantically asked me about a filing deadline. I smiled, reached for my copy of the CPLR and said "Well, let's see what the CPLR has to say about that." That was when I knew I'd truly arrived as a lawyer!

And, last but not least, there is my co-author, Carolyn Elefant.

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By **NICOLE BLACK**

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I first reached out to her via e-mail in 2005, seeking her advice on balancing my newly established contract lawyer practice with my family. Since then she has been an invaluable resource and a wonderful friend. Whenever I need to bounce an idea off of someone, I turn to Carolyn. She is one of the most kind, caring, consummate professionals that I know.

I'm not sure where I'd be but for my mentors. I'm lucky to have had them and am truly grateful to each and every one of them for their advice and guidance over the years.

If you haven't done so lately, let your mentors know how much

you appreciate them. And, if you have the chance to mentor a young attorney, don't pass it up. It's a mutually beneficial relationship that never stops giving.

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