

KTD TRIBUTE

*Ron Cami**

It has been nearly thirty years since I clerked for Judge Duffy, and still when an important topic comes up in my life, personal or professional, I ask myself what the Judge would think. More often than not, I end up smiling or laughing as one of his catchphrases pops into my mind, none of which are appropriate for this piece. Always though, and I mean every single time, I hear him ask: “What’s the right thing to do on a human level? What is the just answer?”

This is how I remember Judge Duffy. He was a brilliant man who was incredibly well-read. The Judge understood all the philosophical and religious ideas of justice, and he could engage in the deepest level of conversation about this erudite topic, but with his Bronx Irish style. I see the Judge in my mind’s eye as I write this. He’s sipping a Diet Coke through a straw and eating a “very well done” steak while telling me that Plato did not know his ass from 14th street and that Aristotle was right. How he could turn a phrase! At his core, however, he believed in a peculiarly American sense of justice where everyone deserves a fair shake, wherever you come from, whatever your status, and that you do not need a lot of fancy words to dispense American justice. All you need is a big heart, a tremendous amount of love for all people, and of course, you need the courage to do the right thing. This is how I remember Judge Duffy—a huge heart, an enormous capacity for love, and limitless courage when it came to dispensing justice.

He was often lauded for being an “independent thinker” or criticized for being unpredictable. A *New York Times* article even called him erratic¹ (the Judge quipped it was typo and they meant “erotic”). These views miss the critical point, and therefore the truth, about Judge Duffy’s approach. He started at the human level and looked at the facts as objectively as anyone can look at them and then did the right thing, applying American justice. To be predictable and consistent in a complex world requires fidelity to a political viewpoint. Judge Duffy directed his fidelity consistently, not to a results-oriented political view, but to the truth of the facts before him and the human beings that those facts impacted. He was a brilliant judge.

So, in the end, Kevin Thomas Duffy is, to me, the iconic American hero. He represents that piece of our character that seeks to do what’s right for its own sake but with wit, humanity, love, and a tinge of rebelliousness. He is

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1. Arnold H. Lubasch, *Judge-Shopping in Federal Court: Lawyers’ Quest for Leniency*, N.Y. TIMES, Mar. 4, 1987, at B1.

the guy throwing tea into Boston Harbor. He is among the original Fighting Irish at Gettysburg. He is the immigrant on the boat at Ellis Island ready to make America better. He is a western sheriff with a white hat walking into a saloon, making all the bad guys quake in their boots. He is all of that wrapped up in one amazing life. We were so lucky to have him in our lives and so lucky to have his lessons endure.