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The shadow that Vietnam cast over our collective futures in June of 1969 vanished quickly for purposes of my hands-on participation when I failed the military’s physical exam, and so, free from the threat of compulsory armed service and totally unsure of what I was to make of myself, I began life after Yale as a tree surgeon in Millbrook (Dutchess County), New York.

Tree surgery is fine work in the summer: the combination of outdoor physical labor and nonbookish intellectual challenge provided a totally satisfying change of pace from life at Yale. But, by January 1970, when the temperature was below zero and I found myself fifty feet in the air in a locust tree with the wind blowing about thirty miles per hour, I concluded that there must be better (or at least warmer) ways to make a living. I resolved to become a lawyer.

I graduated cum laude from Union University-Albany Law School in 1973, married for the first time to a nurse who worked across the street at Albany Medical Center, and settled down to a quiet practice in Poughkeepsie, New York.

In 1975, after two-plus years of closing real estate titles, drafting wills, foreclosing liens, etc., 1 received an offer to clerk for a local judge. When I joined the judge, he (and I) had been transferred to sit in criminal term, Bronx County. The transfer required a commute from Dutchess County (210 miles each day) and provided a whole new education for the country boy who saw real crime in a real city for the first time. (Bad as parts of New Haven may have been when we were there, they were nothing compared to the South Bronx at that time.)

February 8, 1976, marked a major turning point in my life. I was in a severe automobile accident in which my father (the driver) and my first wife were killed. I was very badly injured, thought to be dead, and had a near-death experience (of the type recounted in Moody’s Life After Life) in which I met God. As a result, I am a much more devout Christian than before, and I have also taken refuge in the Buddha as a second, equally valid way of approaching God. (Don’t worry. I never preach, but for those of you who are curious, to me God appeared as an all-forgiving, all-knowing, totally-loving emanation of the clearest light imaginable.)

I married my present wife, Nicola, in October of 1978, left the judge, and after a six-month honeymoon trip around the country in a mobile home, joined the Bronx District Attorney’s Office. Since 1986 I have been Chief of the Appeals Bureau and supervise thirty lawyers and a support staff of about sixteen. I practice now almost exclusively before the top state and federal courts, where I argue the government’s position on questions of criminal justice and social policy that affect the lives of millions of people. My bureau briefs and argues over five hundred cases per year in the various state and federal courts. Personally, I have argued over twenty cases before our top state court and, so far, two before the Supreme Court of the United States. I find immense satisfaction from the litigation part of my job and equally immense agitation from the administrative part of it.

My daughter, Inslee, was bom in 1988, and my son, Charles, was bom in 1991. I live in Irvington, New York, in the last house on a dead-end street and commute seventeen miles to work in the South Bronx. For fun, I ski in winter and play golf (in the nineties) in summer. I play the bagpipes competently and raise orchids with fair success.