

12/24/07

I had heard of Tom Neidl long before I met him or actually saw him in person. Attorneys, particularly assistant district attorneys would tell stories about this guy ANeidl. He was a legend as a prosecutor and also as a prankster. It was always just ANeidl - never Tom or anything else, just ANeidl. There were expressions, Neidlisms if you will, commonly in use by these attorneys that dated back to his time in the DA's office.

For a time, we were neighbors. Although we had still not met each other, I knew who he was and that he lived on the corner near our apartment. My first observation of Tom was startling and an indication of what the future would bring. As I sat on my couch and looked out at New Scotland Avenue, I saw Tom walking a dog. A cigarette was dangling from his mouth and he carried a long-handled pooper-scooper. Without missing a step, he swung the pooper-scooper toward the street, a load of poop flew from the scooper and landed in the middle of the street. He never looked back.

When Tom hired me to work with him in the Criminal Prosecutions Bureau, I did not know what to expect. He was a legend. He was the man who indicted defendants in six questions or less. He was the best that Sol Greenberg's office had produced and now he was my boss. I expected a hard-working, hard-nosed prosecutor and I was scared that I would not measure up to his standards.

So, when Tom sat me down across from his desk and asked me about my ethnicity and then about my wife's ethnicity, I braced myself for something inappropriate and offensive. I wondered if Sol would take me back if I had to tell off this guy with the piercing blue eyes. When Tom said how wonderful a combination of races and ethnicity it was and that my children must be beautiful, I was speechless. As the days passed and Tom spoke of his children, his wife and his dogs, I knew that this was the real Neidl. When he spoke, I heard deep concern for the well-being of others, his sense of fairness, of right and wrong. There were still the Neidlisms of course. Words that were never meant to be combined in a sentence flowed naturally from Tom's lips. Even the most stoic and staid of us were reduced to tears of laughter by Tom and his appreciation of the absurd. In very short order, I joined the many people who simply could not help but love him.

But I was right to be scared. Tom was a warrior and a craftsman in the courtroom. I tell my students that the best attorneys are often not those who appear in the paper and on TV regularly. When I tell them that, I picture Tom Neidl. Without a doubt, Tom was one of the most talented criminal trial attorneys ever to practice law in New York State. No one could put together or take apart a case better than Tom. No one cared more about the client than Tom. Whether it was the People of the State of New York or a young police officer falsely accused of wrongdoing, he cared deeply and it showed. He was the best and the brightest.

An appreciation of the absurd is something I was lucky enough to share with Tom. Our love of The Three Stooges, in his words, the most underrated comedy team of the thirties and forties, was another. Tom took great pride in the fact that his daughters shared his appreciation of the Stooges. He took great pride in the accomplishments of all of his children but this was a true Neidlistm that he passed on to them. His love of family was always there for all to see. There were many days that I asked for his advice on how to be the kind of father he was to his children; on how I could make that much of an impression on my daughter, my son.

I never understood, until now, why Tom only liked the Three Stooges episodes with

Curly. Tom would tell me there was only one Curly. Shemp was good. Joe and Curly Joe were forgettable; they just could never measure up to Curly. The Stooges went on without Curly, but it was never really the same, never as good without him. Now I understand Tom. Life will go on but it will never be the same, never as good without you. You were one of a kind.

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