

Loss of Good Lawyer Shows Need To Learn How To Help Colleagues

For many barristers — especially those of us who knew and worked with Len Morton — the upcoming June 16 “Lawyers Helping Lawyers Volunteer Training” program has a certain sense of urgency — and loss.

Attorney Len Morton, 45, died a few weeks back when he plunged from the top of a building at Broadway and Barclay Street.

This initiative, a joint effort by the Brooklyn Bar Association, the NYC Bar Association and the NYS Lawyer Assistance Program, will help practitioners to “learn how to recognize and help themselves, colleagues and clients who may be suffering from addiction, depression, or other mental health issues.”

It runs from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. at the New York City Bar Association, 42 West 44th St.

Len’s mother, Deanna Morton, 69, died in her sleep three years ago. His father died a year later. Len often talked with pride of his mother’s work — she was a partner in a well-regarded public relations firm, Infini Tech, LLC.

When I worked with Len Morton, through much of the last decade, as an administrative judge at the Taxi & Limousine Commission, he was not just a happy guy, but kind, knowledgeable, engaging and committed to the rule of law. No doubt, so many of us thought, Len Morton would go on to lead a very good life.

So, when news reports talked about a 45-year-old lawyer named Leonard Morton who died after plunging from a building near City Hall, my first thought was, “What a coincidence. There’s another lawyer in Manhattan with the same name as my friend Len.”

While I hadn’t seen him in the past few years, it was easy to assume that the self-effacing attorney, who, last I heard, was married to a wonderful and talented woman, was doing well.

Finally, an e-mail from a colleague bore the sad news that the lawyer who had died so tragically was indeed the Len Morton who had actually been a mentor to me at the Taxi & Limousine Commission.

“An Excellent Judge ... A Great Sense of Humor”

Along with a few others, such as Chief Administrative Judge Beth Bonina and her successor, Pat Russo, Len guided me and others into the



Laura Messina



Attorney Len Morton, seen in this LinkedIn photo, was separated from his wife Dara.

challenging cyber world when the TLC went “hi-tech.” (Judges would no longer write out their decisions — each and every ruling had to be entered onto the TLC website.)

Hon. Bonina, who was then the chief administrative judge at the TLC, was immediately impressed with Len’s skills when she took over the top post.

“I immediately promoted Len to the position of assistant chief ALJ, not only because he was an excellent judge, but also because he had the respect of his colleagues,” she said. “Len served as my assistant chief ALJ during my entire six-year tenure as chief judge, and I was always able to count on his legal skills and leadership skills to make sure the TLC tribunals functioned in a professional manner. Len was kind, he had a great sense of humor, and he will be greatly missed by everyone who knew him.”

Sharing Hon. Bonina’s feelings was attorney Laura Messina, a former TLC administrative judge.

“I remember him as being very funny, kind and sensitive. When I was new at the TLC, he was one of the first to tell me if I needed anything, not to hesitate to ask,” she said. “Then, after I joined the NYS Court System (in Kings County Supreme Court) and he became one of my court examiners, he made touching comments about having to examine and question parents of a severely damaged child, telling me, ‘There but for the grace of God.’”

“He was with us this past Fall when Hon. Beth Bonina organized



Hon. Pat Russo



Hon. Beth Bonina

a TLC night at Almond Restaurant in NYC,” she recalled. “It was the last time I saw him. He was very animated and made me laugh, recounting our experiences. I had no idea there were any problems with his marriage, nor did I suspect he was depressed. His death is a tragedy.”

At that time, Len’s problems had actually become serious. He separated from Dara, his wife of three years. And, according to a close friend, “He could get quite boisterous and very loud when he was in that (bipolar) stage.”

“It would be hard for anyone to endure,” the friend said. “You reach a breaking point. He was a wonderful son to both his mother and father.”

The Lawyers Helping Lawyers program will award participants with 5 MCLE credits, three in Practice Management and two in Ethics.

Lawyers should contact Linda McMahon at lmcmahon@nysba.org or 518-487-5686 to register.

Calling All Non-Golfers to Hon. Theodore Jones Golf Outing

Many lawyers we’ve talked with are definitely planning to attend the Second Annual Justice Theodore Jones Memorial golf outing, set for April 28. Some had said that they would have been there last year, but they don’t play golf. But that’s no longer a deal-breaker.

The Brooklyn Bar Association powers-that-be have wisely decided to accommodate those who don’t golf and have gotten out an announcement that reads, “New for non-golfers: In order to accommodate non-golfers who want to arrive early, we’ve added a free afternoon yoga class and beginner’s golf clinic. For an additional \$25, you, a non-golfer, can add a 40-minute massage to your day!”

Credit BBA President Andy Fallek, Executive Director Avery Okin and the BBA Golf Committee for coming up with this solution.

Other BBA officers (likely looking for a sub-par performance at the Justice Jones outing) are President-elect Rebecca Woodland, First Vice President Arthur Aidala, Second Vice President Hon. Frank Seddio, Secretary Aimee Richter and Treasurer David Chidekel.

Meanwhile, the BBA Continuing Legal Education agenda continues to move smoothly into Spring as CLE Executive Director Meredith Symonds has arranged a series of programs created to inform and fulfill lawyers’ registration requirements.



Brooklyn Bar Association President Andy Fallek



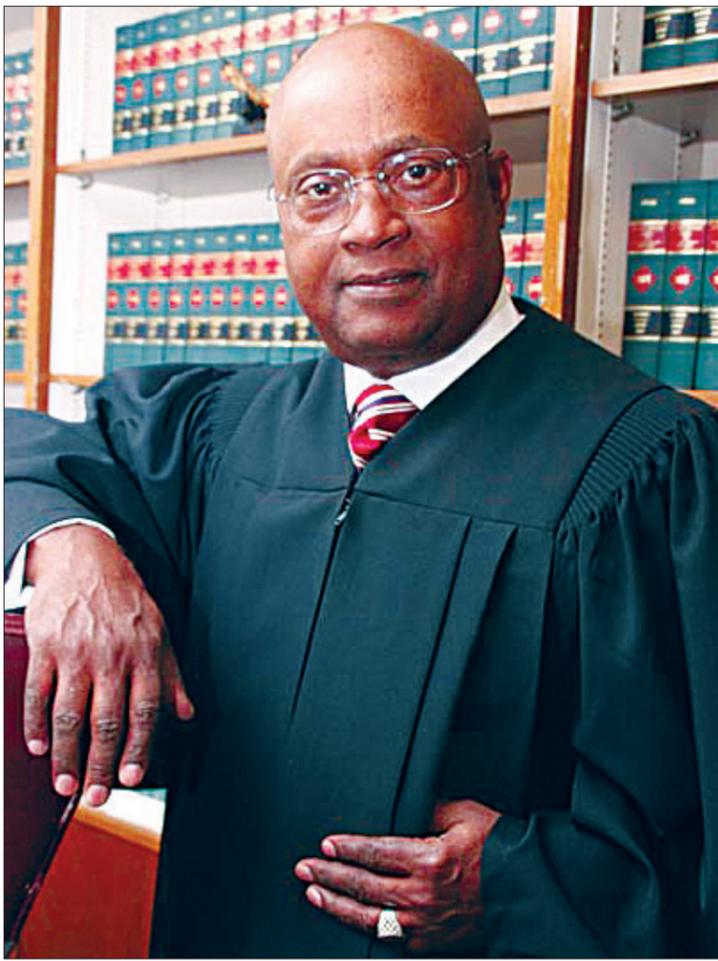
Brooklyn Bar Association President-elect Rebecca Woodland

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PRO BONO BARRISTER is a weekly column dedicated to telling about the good that lawyers do. Send your comments or suggestions to this writer care of this newspaper or to COTEYESQ@aol.com.

Notice: Readers seeking legal representation on a Pro Bono Publico basis should not contact this columnist. Rather, they should seek out the Brooklyn Bar Association Volunteer Lawyers Project at 718-624-3894.



Late Justice Theodore Jones

Eagle file photos