

Memorialized Resolution of the Dauphin County Bar Association

Upon the Death of Bernard L. Coates, Jr.

Bernie was born on July 20, 1960, the fourth of five children to Bernard and Marie Coates of Steelton, PA. He is survived by his four adoring and loving sisters, Cathy, Carol, Judy, and Lisa, and two caring and wonderful children, Caleigh and Trey. Bernie grew up in Steelton and never really left Steelton. You see, Steelton wasn't a geographical location or mailing address to Bernie, it was a mindset, a way of life and a way of caring for people. The friends Bernie made on the ball fields, in the homes, and streets of Steelton, were his friends for life. His family and Steelton friends kept him very well grounded. Bernie never lost sight of where he came from, or where he was going. Where Bernie was going and where he is now is where we wanted to be, and all want to be. Steelton flowed through his veins until he joined our Lord on September 17 of this year.

Growing up Bernie was a gifted athlete, was blessed with good looks, a quick wit and a disarming charm. God's gifts came naturally to Bernie and he worked hard to make the most of them, sharing them with everyone he came across. Although he was taken from us way too soon, Bernie made the most of the time he shared with us. He understood that time was something you cannot recreate, and when you were fortunate to share time with Bernie, he made your time more valuable.

Bernie graduated from Steel High and brought a little bit of Steelton to "Happy Valley" where he was a valued member of the Penn State baseball team. Motivated by a desire to give back to his community, Bernie attended Dayton Law School, and returned home where he served as an assistant district attorney under then District Attorney Rich Lewis. While serving as a DA Bernie earned a reputation as a skilled prosecutor, admired for a proper balance of protecting our neighbors with the compassion his parents instilled in him. Bernie never forgot that he was his brothers' keeper.

Bernie began his career in the private sector as an insurance defense attorney at Thomas, Thomas & Hafer. He was loved and respected by friends and adversaries alike. But insurance defense work didn't really satisfy his desire to help his neighbors in need of fairness and justice. Under the tutelage of John Mancke and Rich Wagner, Bernie quickly established himself as an effective advocate, and enjoyed a reputation for candor, creativity and reasonableness. These skills later served him well as a Juvenile Master where his innate sense of fairness and compassion flourished. His private practice was devoted to helping our neighbors and friends in need. While his time was valuable, he often did not put a value on his time as he regularly provided pro bono service with an "I'll catch up with ya". Bernie's practice was not about helping others amass wealth, accumulating or dividing things, it was much more simple than that. Bernie was about helping people when they were most vulnerable; helping them build and rebuild their lives.

Bernie's experience as a Juvenile Master allowed him to have direct and life-changing impact on many lives in our community. This was his primary motivation to seek a seat on the Dauphin County bench. Bernie wasn't political by nature. He really didn't care what your party affiliation was, and wasn't known to talk about politics in general. His interest in politics was about serving the community and he was known to have supported public servants from both parties who are interested in serving our community and providing fairness to all regardless of who they were, or what they were.

Although he was not political by nature, his campaign made him "alive". Bernie was a natural at grass-roots, retail politics, as he truly enjoyed connecting with people. Like many other aspects of his life, Bernie's campaign was about team play. Although he was the captain of Team Coates, it wasn't really about Bernie, it was about his family. He was a humble man, but Bernie did enjoy seeing the Coates name on yard signs and bumper stickers. It was not because it was his name, but because it was the name his parents had given him, the one he shared with his sisters, and the one he had given to his wife, Karen, and beloved children, Caleigh and Trey. Bernie never sought to have his name attached to some learned treatise, public monument, or building, Bernie was about building and rebuilding people. You walk past living, breathing monuments to Bernie every day without knowing it. That is how he intended.

Bernie loved being a Judge. He did enjoy the intellectual challenge and calling balls and strikes, but what he enjoyed most was making a difference in peoples' lives. He was known to often follow up with the people who appeared before him to provide encouragement. Bernie never forgot that we are attorneys and counselors at law. He was a great counselor. In this regard Bernie was somewhat dismayed that we as a society expect people with much worse circumstances, education and resources, who found themselves in the juvenile and criminal justice system to get along, when we as lawyers and judges cannot convince our clients to get along, or even get along among ourselves. If Bernie were here today, he would remind us to be kind to one another.

Truth be known, what Bernie liked most about being a Judge was it allowed him to spend more time with his children. Bernie was particularly efficient in getting matters resolved when they stood between him and Trey and Caleigh. While Bernie, like most judges, really enjoyed putting on the robe in the morning, Bernie enjoyed taking it off in the afternoon more.

Bernie leaves us with a legacy of compassion and faith. Perhaps his greatest gift to all of us is perspective. Bernie really knew what mattered, and made us all better.

Therefore, be it resolved that in the passing of Bernie Coates, the Bar, the Court, and the community have lost a loving father, caring brother and faithful friend. While we will miss him greatly and tender our sympathy and condolences to his family, we do so knowing that Bernie left us all a little better than before we knew him.

Be it further resolved that we all shall recommit ourselves as gate-keepers of a justice system where all may find compassion and fairness.

And be it further resolved that copies of this Memorial Resolution shall be spread upon the records of the Dauphin County Courts and the Dauphin County Bar Association, and that the original shall be filed in the Office of the Prothonotary, and copies transmitted to his family.

Respectfully Submitted,

The Bernie Coates
Memorial Committee



John J. McNally, III



Rich Wagner



Steve Nicholas

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