



Jonathan E. Gradess

August 5, 1947 - October 2, 2019

Poestenkill - It is with great sadness that we acknowledge the loss of our beloved husband, father, and friend, Jonathan Gradess after a brief illness.

As with everything else in his life, he left us on his own terms with joy and peace in his heart on Wednesday, October 2, 2019.

Jonathan was born August 5, 1947 in New York City the son of Edward and Ella Gradess. He was raised in New York and Connecticut but for the last thirty years called Poestenkill home. He was a member of the charter class of Hofstra University Law School and spent his entire professional career seeking justice for the downtrodden and disenfranchised among us. For thirty-nine years he was the executive director of the NYS Defenders Association in Albany and happily retired in 2017. He believed that everyone charged with a crime was entitled the best legal representation and he worked every day toward that end. During his career, he served on many boards and committees including Equal Justice USA, New Yorkers Against the Death Penalty, and the Commission on Restorative Justice of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Albany. He worked tirelessly to abolish the death penalty in New York and throughout the United States. After listening to the stories of the many Forgotten Victims of Attica (the prison employees killed or injured during

the uprising), he joined their crusade and took their demands to the legislature and the Governor. While a member of St. Henry's Parish in Averill Park, he started a program to provide furniture to recovering addicts taking the next step in their lives.

Jonathan was a deeply spiritual man and his faith led him to see every human being he met as an encounter with the divine. He never wavered in this belief. Wherever he went he carried change in his pocket and offered it joyfully to those who asked for it.

Jonathan is survived by his wife, Diane Geary, his sons Benjamin (Kelli), Michael and Sam, his brother Roger (Regina), sisters-in-law Joan Geary and Maryann Geary, brothers-in-law John Geary and Glenn Geary, nieces and nephew as well as his dear friend Colesvintong Florestal.

A life-long lover of film, he shared this passion with his family. Jonathan spent many a wonderful afternoon at the Spectrum 8 movie theater. He will be missed by the ticket sellers and concession stand workers. He was certain their popcorn was the best!

A celebration of Jonathan's life will take place on Thursday, October 10, 4:00 pm at the Unitarian Universalist Society of Albany, 405 Washington Avenue, Albany.

To leave a message for the family, please visit www.McveighFuneralHome.com

In lieu of flowers we ask that you make a contribution to these organizations that were close to Jonathan's heart: The Upper Room Inclusive Catholic Community <https://www.upperroomicc.org/>, NYS Defenders Association, and Equal Justice USA.

Tribute Wall



“ *Jonathan E. Gradess*

October 08, 2023 at 09:24 PM



“ *Unfortunately, I just learned of Jonathan's passing. I served on the Board of Directors many years ago, and came to know and love Jonathan for all he stood for and fought for.*

He was truly a mentor and shining light, and his relentless fight for justice and fairness for all affected by the Criminal Justice system continues to inspire me.

Jonathan's legacy lives on for ever.

God Bless You, Jonathan, and may you truly rest in Peace.

Elan Y. Cherney - Washington County

Elan Y. Cherney - October 23, 2019 at 11:47 AM



“ *Diane and Gradess boys: I am sorry for your loss. Your father was truly a man of great faith and conviction. I had nothing but respect for his devotion to the cause of criminal defense. He was a friend to so many. He will be missed. May his memory be a blessing.*

Peter G Pollak - October 17, 2019 at 03:17 PM

JM

“ *Diane, I just read on Equal Justice about Jonathan's death. I am so sorry. He truly was a great person and such a lover of justice and life. What a loss for you and your family as well as for those others who cared for him. We were away and did not about the service.*
Jim Murphy

Jim Murphy - October 11, 2019 at 03:12 PM

SC

“ *Accept my sympathy on the death of Johnathan. He certainly was a man dedicated to love of God and all people. May God bless him and you his family.*
Sister Geraldine C.P.P.S.

Sister Geraldine Vogel CPPS - October 11, 2019 at 12:55 PM

SS

“ *Dear Diane, Michael, Sam, and Ben,*
Words can never describe the profound mark that Jonathan made on the world. EJUSA exists because of him. He touched more people and mended more hearts than anyone I know. There is so much more to say but I am still trying to find the words. For now please know that I have been thinking of you all every day, sending my deepest condolences, love, and gratitude to you and all of Jonathan's family.
Love,
Shari

Shari Silberstein - October 10, 2019 at 11:46 AM

ML

“ I send my hear-felt condolences to the family of Jonathan. He was a very sweet man with deep commitments to those people who need a legal defense. I participated in some of his training sessions and was very impressed with his mission and concrete work to make the world a better place. With respect, Mabel Leon

mabel leon - October 10, 2019 at 11:34 AM

SD

“ Diane,
My condolences for your families loss. You are in my prayers.
Sunny DeLory

Sunny DeLory - October 09, 2019 at 11:38 AM



“ Dear Diane and family. I am so very sorry for your loss. The world has lost a truly kind and compassionate soul, at a time when we need him most. Take care.
Philomena Valente

Philomena Valente - October 09, 2019 at 09:12 AM

DB

“ Sincere condolences to Jon's family. I was a classmate of Jon's at Knox College and was looking forward to seeing him at our upcoming reunion. I remember him as being one of the more passionate and articulate advocates for social justice at Knox.

David Bell

David Bell - October 08, 2019 at 01:33 PM

EN

“ *Diane and family,*

Jonathan and I attended Knox College together. He was a passionate defender of human rights in college; articulate, smart, and stubborn in a very genuine and engaging way. I was looking forward to seeing him at our reunion. He will be missed by all he met and engaged during his lifetime.

Ed Novak

ed novak - October 08, 2019 at 12:57 PM

TC

“ *Diane & family,*

There are few great people who change their communities for the better and Jon was one of those people. I started working with Jon at DCJS in 1977 and he has been an inspiration and role model for me since. We worked in the legislature together on a number of criminal justice issues. I helped him with the St. Henry's furniture program and took over his Social Justice class at St. Henry;'s taking local teens to volunteer at the Food Bank, various food pantries and Joseph's house. His sense of social justice and living your faith through action to help those less fortunate will always be an inspiration to me. My condolences for your loss and great loss to our community.

Tom Cetrino

THOMAS CETRINO - October 08, 2019 at 12:31 PM

EG

“ *Very sorry to see this news - Jonathan was such a bright light in the legal world. We first met when he traveled out to a meeting of the Delaware County Bar Association, in his constant effort to improve the justice system and ensure quality representation for all. I was deeply impressed with him and his good work. A true hero, he will be sorely missed. My sympathies and condolences to his family, Hon. Elizabeth Garry, Presiding Justice, Appellate Division Third Dept.*

Elizabeth Garry - October 08, 2019 at 10:40 AM

JP

“ *Diane, Ben, Mike and Sam, I am very sorry and saddened to read Jonathan's obituary. I remember him as Zero the Hero, St. Henry's Social Justice Committee and the NYS Public Defenders group that a bunch of us attended. Jonathan was always smiling and he was a great person! He touched many lives! You will be in my thoughts and prayers.*

Janet Provost

Janet Marie Provost - October 07, 2019 at 03:48 PM

MB

“ My wife Nancy and I got to know Jonathan as he and Gary Horton worked tirelessly and without pay to secure a measure of justice for the Forgotten Victims of Attica, being the prison guards and civilian employees and their families whom the State sacrificed and then swindled during and after the 1971 riot. Jonathan was delightful to be with, and it’s inspiring to think about his long and full commitment to justice. He did what the best people have always done, which is to help people in need, and he helped a great many. He left us too soon. Nancy and I offer our deep sympathy to everyone who loved him.

Malcolm Bell

Malcolm Bell - October 07, 2019 at 11:41 AM

DC

“ I am so deeply sorry. Jonathan was a hero to me when I was a young attorney. He inspired everyone around him.

Deborah Czuba - October 07, 2019 at 10:34 AM

MM

“ 1 file added to the album Memories Album



Mike Mayer - October 07, 2019 at 09:38 AM

DD

“ *Diane and Family,
Jonathan always saw God in others-no matter what they looked like,
no matter their station in life, no matter their faith..... This is not
always easy to do but he did it. But anytime I saw Jonathan or
heard him speak, I immediately saw and heard the Divine. It was
just so clear. What a special person and how very sorry I am for
your loss.*
Dave DeBonis

David DeBonis - October 06, 2019 at 06:35 PM



“ *Jonathan was always so gracious. I did not know him well, but I did
know him from the time of the very first National Coalition to Abolish
the Death Penalty annual conference that I attended, way back
around 1989 or 1990. I was just a young whippersnapper, but
Jonathan always made me feel welcome and valued. So we got to
say hello every so often...*

*I wanted also to simply note for you all that the day of his memorial,
October 10th, happens to also be World Day Against the Death
Penalty. Many of us will remember Jonathan as an abolitionist hero
on that day. I believe he would be pleased about that.*

Big hugs to you all.

--abe

*Abraham J. Bonowitz
Fan of Jonathan Gradess*

Abraham Bonowitz - October 05, 2019 at 10:29 PM

JP

“ 1 file added to the album *Memories Album*



jill Paperno - October 05, 2019 at 09:00 PM

EF

“ *Jonathan's life was a model of inclusive compassion for all of those involved in the dysfunctional criminal justice system. Everyone he came into contact with gained a new deeper understanding of the breadth of the community we share.*

May we all learn the lessons he taught and honor his memory by putting them into practice.

Eric M. Freedman

Hofstra law professor and comrade in arms of some 35 years

Eric M. Freedman - October 05, 2019 at 08:37 PM

SA

“ *I had the pleasure of knowing Jonathan from the time he was my law professor/father's star pupil at Hofstra Law School in the early 70's. Working with him when I was an adult added meaning to my life as Jonathan dedicated himself to making life better for all. He was a good soul and a mensch. My deepest sympathies to his loving family.*

Seth Agata

Seth Agata - October 05, 2019 at 07:42 PM

GO

“ My heart is so saddened by the news of Jonathan 's passing. My memories of this kind man are all about his generous spirit and helping hand. Recently I was made aware of him saying to folks that he gave some of his treasure to that he saw the face of God in their face.How that must have brightened their day. We will miss your comments on our shared homilies at the Upper Room. Rest in peace, dear friend. Ginny O'BRIEN

ginny o'brien - October 05, 2019 at 04:40 PM

DW

“ Dear Diane and family,
I was very sad to learn that Jonathan passed away and wish to express my condolences. He made a difference in the lives of people with his commitment to equal justice and his career in public defense and at the New York State Defenders Association. I wish to express my sincere condolences to you and your family.

Sincerely,

David Weisfuse

Chief Counsel,

Legal Aid Society of Westchester County

David Weisfuse - October 05, 2019 at 03:55 PM

VS

I met Jonathan during "the Great Habeas Wars" in the late 1980's and worked with him intermittently over the years. He was always there when he was needed, always devoted to helping those less fortunate, and always a delight to work with. I was so sorry to hear of his death and send my condolences to his family and friends. His death is a huge loss to our community. and the many people who relied on him for help and good cheer. Ginny Sloan

Virginia Sloan - October 06, 2019 at 08:14 AM

RB

“ 1 file added to the tribute wall



RC Boruchowitz - October 05, 2019 at 10:25 AM

RB

This was one of the great days I had with Jonathan, riding in the Nevada mountains. Bob Boruchowitz

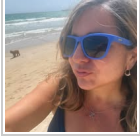
RC Boruchowitz - October 05, 2019 at 10:25 AM

LO

“ 1 file added to the album Memories Album



Larry OBrien - October 05, 2019 at 07:26 AM



“ *Karla Andreu Jonathan Gradess was my teacher. My mentor. He believed in me. He hold me to the the highest bar of how I should behave with another human being. Is it the upbringing that makes someone commit a "crime"? Is it his "circumstances"? How is it that is the same people that are being chased? I was his Community Organizer, his firecracker, as he used to call me. Because of him I saw the cruelty of the US criminal justice system and how punitive, unforgiving and unfair it can be. He always took a phone call from prison.. always. We went far. How can we make a fairer system for the hard of hearing, for the immigrant, for the indian that comes from a reservation and is tried in a court that he doesn't believe. He is light. Honor. and the highest bar of humanism I've ever witnessed. Thank you Jonathan, your Caribbean firecracker.*

Karla Andreu - October 04, 2019 at 09:52 PM

RH

“ *I will remember Jonathan best for his work with me in the New York State Senate to ensure that every individual receive representation in court; regardless of their ability to pay. Justice was your hallmark Jonathan; RIP.*

Ruth Hassell-Thompson - October 04, 2019 at 08:41 PM