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Gideon's Promise Class of 2013

How did I come to work in indigent defense? Honestly, it was Gideon's Promise. In college I worked at the Huntsville "Walls" Unit in Huntsville, Texas. The Walls Unit is where the death row executions are performed. I received a degree in Criminal Justice and after graduation I was a parole and probation officer. So needless to say I had a pretty decent familiarity with the criminal justice system.

When I came out of law school I really did not want anything to do with criminal law. It was what I knew and wanted to learn other areas of law and used what I learned in law school to try new things. So for the first few years I focused in the areas of family law, wrongful foreclosures, and some probate law. Another important reason I stayed away from criminal defense is because I didn't have a mentor in the area and I was not about to start practicing any criminal law without having some serious guidance. I had heard too many war stories about people taking pleas because their lawyers were afraid to fight or didn't know what they were doing. I did not want to be one of those guys.

That all changed in early 2013. The Harris County Public Defender's Office applied for and received a grant from The Justice Department that would be known to become The Future Appointed Counsel Training Program (F.A.C.T Program). The FACT Program would send a total of 20 non public defenders/private attorneys over a two year period to Gideon's Promise's Summer Training Institute. After the FACTers returned from the training they would each be paired with a specially selected mentor in Harris County, Texas for a year. The overall purpose of the grant was to train young attorneys in the "correct" way. Train them to be client centered and fighters so that when these young attorneys get an opportunity to get appointed cases they wouldn't just pela clients out. They would work the cases up and fight for their clients.

The whole purpose of this program spoke exactly to what my fears were. I saw The FACT Program/Gideon's Promise as a way to learn criminal defense correctly and also have a community I could go to for help whenever needed. In addition, everyone involved with the programs were credible individuals so you knew you could rely on their experience and advice.

I was fortunate enough to be selected into the first class (2013) and have not looked back since. I have been practicing criminal defense with a concentration on indigent defense for almost three years now. Gideon's Promise has changed my life. I have a renewed purpose. Purpose is an important thing. It's the yellow brick road in your life. The community is the most important part of Gideon's Promise. There's a community that speaks the same language and goes through the same struggles. When one of us loses, we all lose. When one of us wins, we all feel it.

I don't yet have one story about a client that stands out from the rest. For me it is more of a general frustration I feel for all those individuals who are sitting in jail with a lawyer who doesn't care about them or their situation. I've seen it too many times. I pray for a day when that is no longer the case. I pray for a time when all lawyers care about their clients. I will probably not see that in my lifetime so I have to keep fighting to make it better for those who come behind me.

- Brandon