

Devin Franklin, Assistant Public Defender
Atlanta Judicial Circuit; Atlanta, Georgia
Gideon's Promise Class of 2010

Dear Friend of Gideon's Promise,

Once upon a time, I did not believe I had the heart for this work. Or any work of its kind for that matter. I said as much in March 2006 when I went on a scholarship interview at Mercer Law School, and I truly meant it. To take things a step further, despite seeking admission into law school, I had no intentions or desires whatsoever to ever actually practice law in any capacity, especially not as a public defender.

My concern, personally, was never one of representing "those" people. My problem was cowardice. I could not imagine living my life where if I messed up somehow, someone else could go to prison. Not to mention, I simply had other plans.

I was a Sport Management major. Since I was about eleven years old, the only designs I had on a career were to work in player personnel for a sport franchise or to become the Black Jerry Maguire. I was going to travel a lot for my work and make lots of money. The degree from law school would only help me in those endeavors, I thought.

I smile now, looking back at my younger self. I never could have imagined that I would literally stumble into a profession that adds value to my life. I was once enthralled with living my life in a bigger way, materially. But thankfully, the path I sauntered upon led me to a job that has brought more tangible meaning and joy into my life a job in that it allows me to have a bigger impact on the lives of others.

And that is not an overstatement in the slightest. Sure it would've been cool to negotiate multi-million dollar contracts and go to sporting events all across the country as part of my job. There is no denying that. But it's even cooler that my job as a Public Defender allows me to tell the story of how James Davis doesn't have to die in prison because his daughter lied about him committing a drive-by shooting on her apartment complex. It's cooler to talk about how winning a suppression motion kept a 19 year-old Roderick Dennis from having to go to trial or take a plea on a case that could have seen him serve up to 40 years in prison without parole for drug possession. It's far cooler to tell the story about Munir Dixon walking out of the Fulton County Jail and feeling the sun on his face for the first time in 688 days after having been held in custody for a murder he didn't commit due largely to a lazy investigation. It's cooler to talk about the many young mothers who are allowed to continue to be young mothers to their children and their children remain on honor roll at school because we were able to tell her entire life story to a judge who saw her as a victim of circumstance.

Being a Public Defender means having a job that not only allows, but encourages you to see the good in people. It means learning that you have the heart to have a heart, and to give a damn about those that the world would rather discard. I'm not sure it is necessarily the way to live a better life --- at least not materially, in the way that my younger self would have desired. But I can honestly stand flat-footed before anyone and tell them that being a Public Defender has made me a better person.

Sincerely,

Devin