

## I'll See You in Court

by Daniel H. Kolber

Upon graduating from Virginia Law in 1978 I became an associate in the corporate department of a large Wall Street law firm.

Most of the clients were large corporations, but occasionally there would be a small business client, often a friend of a partner who had a legal problem.

One day during my first year, I was summoned by a partner and given an assignment. I was to attempt to negotiate a settlement of a small landlord/tenant dispute on behalf of my client, the tenant. The client was not some large corporation so I frugally took the subway to the landlord's office which was located in a small building in lower Manhattan. I was escorted into a rather messy office with furniture from the 1950s.

My adversary was an elderly man with a gruff manner. After some small talk, I told the landlord what my client was willing to do to settle the dispute. The landlord rejected my proposal immediately. There was no counter-offer, just a

shake of his head and a statement that he was not budging from his position.

This gave me the opportunity to utter the words, the threat, that I had waited to say ever since I was sworn into the Virginia Bar during my third year of law school. Standing up, clutching my briefcase, puffing out my chest, I looked the elderly man straight in the eyes and said in my sternest voice, lowering it an octave or two, "Well, then," I almost shouted, "I'll see you in court!"

There was a pause while I held his stare and then he started laughing, not a strained, nervous laugh, no, a real, raucous belly laugh. A laugh as if he had just heard the funniest joke in his life. Confused, I turned around and walked out of the office, down the stairs, still hearing the hearty laughter behind me.

When I got back to my law firm, I reported to the partner who had dispatched me what had happened. He started laughing at me, too. "What's so funny?" I wanted to know.

He said, "You idiot, do you realize who you threatened?" My blank look told him I had no idea.

"He's a made man, one of the top gangsters in New York!"

I took different routes to and from work for the next few weeks.

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