

Newton N. Minow†

I was blessed to have Ab in my life from the very beginning.

We were born four days apart in the same Milwaukee hospital in January of 1926. Both of us had parents with Jewish roots who had come to Milwaukee from Ukraine in the early part of the twentieth century. My mother and father arrived as small children. Ab's mother and father were older when they arrived years later. Ab and I both attended a fine public school, Washington High School, which provided a first-rate, excellent education. Judge Milton Shadur was ahead of us at Washington, and later was Ab's law partner with Justice Arthur Goldberg before Milt became a distinguished federal judge in Chicago.

Adolf Hitler invaded Poland and the United States entered the war while Ab and I were in high school. At Washington, Ab and I competed for the same job, editor-in-chief of the *Washington Scroll*, our high school newspaper. Ab won the job, but made me sports editor, which showed his political skills; he told me it was a better job. We both were involved as debaters, and in all high school activities. We were both interested in the same girl—fortunately neither of us got her. There was a weekly poker game at Ab's house with a five-cent limit for raises; Ab's mother was a regular participant, and the game always produced many laughs and good spirits, with one eye on the war.

Ab enlisted in the Air Force and became an officer and navigator. I enlisted in the Army and became a sergeant in the China/Burma/India theater. We both survived safely and went to college and law school with the benefit of the GI Bill. Ab went to the University of Wisconsin, met Zoe, and then went to The University of Chicago Law School. I went to Northwestern, met Jo, and then went to Northwestern Law School. This time, each of us became editor-in-chief of our respective law reviews and were recommended for the same job: law clerk for Justice Sherman Minton at the Supreme Court of the United States.

I went to Washington for my interview with Minton, who told me he wanted to hire Midwestern students, but that he had a few

† Senior Counsel, Sidley Austin, LLP; Former Chairman, Federal Communications Commission.

days ago hired another young man from Chicago. He said his name was Miska or maybe Mifka. I said, "Mr. Justice, it is Mikva my childhood friend!" I called Ab from Washington to tell him the good news; Ab had not yet received Minton's letter. I told him he had done it again, just as in Washington High School. However, I then got a lucky break because another law clerk vacancy developed with Chief Justice Fred Vinson, who hired Northwestern graduates, and I started work in the middle of the 1950–1951 term before Ab and Zoe arrived to serve in the 1951–1952 term. Jo found an apartment for Ab and Zoe near us in Parkfairfax, Virginia, and we served together at the Supreme Court along with my friend and later law partner, Howard Trienens.

A happy tradition at the Supreme Court is that each justice meets for lunch with all that term's law clerks for an informal conversation in which the clerks ask the justice questions. The *Brown* case—whether to order desegregation of America's public schools—was pending at the Court, but was delayed and postponed for argument and decision. Ab and I asked Justice Felix Frankfurter why the *Brown* case was not scheduled. Frankfurter responded, "Do you think we are going to decide that case in an election year?" Ab and I learned a lot that day.

In our law clerk class that term was another Milwaukee young man, William Rehnquist, later Chief Justice Rehnquist. Many years later, when Ab and I were planning a reunion at the Court with our term's law clerks, I called the chief justice to ask if he would participate, he said yes on one condition: he would not be a player in the Trienens-Mikva poker game in which he consistently lost when we were all law clerks together in 1951 and 1952.

When Ab and I celebrated our ninetieth birthdays together this January, we agreed that we both were very lucky to have long, happy marriages, Ab with Zoe, and me with Jo. We also agreed that our most important contributions were that each of us has three daughters. Of the six daughters, five are lawyers—all in some form of public service—and one a rabbi, all doing good in the world.

We were involved in all Ab's political campaigns, and I often served as campaign treasurer. One story about the 1978 campaign, his last: Late in the campaign, Ab called me to report that the President of the United States, Jimmy Carter, had offered to come to Chicago to campaign for him, but that we would have to pay a percentage of the Air Force One expense. I asked, "How much?" Ab said, "\$25,000." I said, "We don't have \$25,000." Ab: "I

know, but the president says he knows you and he will come to your home for a brief fundraiser to raise the money.” I said, “Do you think it is worth it?” Ab: “Yes, by all means.” I said, “Ok,” and called my wife Jo who almost fainted but said, “Let’s do it for our dear friend, Abner.” So we did, and the president, with the Secret Service complete with sniffing dogs, arrived, with the Glencoe police chief observing that a president had never before entered the village. And Ab won the election—barely with a handful of votes.

We’ve all heard the story about Ab’s first entrance to Chicago politics, when he came to the Democratic Ward Committee Headquarters to volunteer. The committeeman, cigar in his mouth, asked, “Who sent you?” Ab said, “Nobody.” The committeeman removed the cigar from his mouth and said, “We don’t want nobody nobody sent.”

In July of 2016, Ab arrived in heaven, and at the entrance to the pearly gates, the committeeman for the District of Heaven asked, “Who sent you?” Ab said, “Nobody.” The committeeman asked, “What is your name?” and Ab said, “Abner Mikva.” The committeeman said, “Hold on. I’ll Google you and check your name.” After checking, he said, “Judge Mikva, welcome. There are two gentlemen here who also died on July 4 who have invited you for dinner, Thomas Jefferson and John Adams. Welcome and c’mon in!”