Preface

“Be safe, son.”

How often do fathers use that phrase, and in what circumstances? Certainly, I never expected having to say it as my son, Michael, prepared to go to an unnamed Caribbean destination to meet with a client in the witness protection program of a third country. But perhaps I shouldn’t have been surprised. This is the same son who suggested the gift of a bulletproof vest when he began walking a beat with the local auxiliary police. That, I think, is the author of this book in a nutshell.

My professional life was spent representing people before the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service, the State Department, and the courts in achieving immigration statuses and defending them against removal. Michael’s first position from law school was to work with the U.S. attorney’s office in Brooklyn—enforcing immigration law. But when he left government service, he did so with a sense of responsibility. He joined my law firm with an awareness of the blind spots in the system and a determination to help the government—while still protecting his clients and their interests.

To my mind, the most complimentary thing a son can do to honor his father is to model his professional life after his father’s. Michael appears to have paid me that ultimate respectful compliment—and he has done so in more than coming aboard at Wildes & Weinberg.

I joined the faculty at Cardozo Law School in 1980, soon after the school opened, to establish the original immigration law course of study. Some thirty years later, I withdrew from the position to concentrate on writing a book on my representation of John Lennon in his deportation case, a story that needed to be told. Michael was immediately hired as adjunct professor to continue teaching the general course on immigration law that I had founded.
However, I can proudly assert that this was not a case of Michael following in my footsteps. He succeeded in broadening our legal practice into areas I had not undertaken, opening offices I had not contemplated. Wildes & Weinberg now maintains a presence in New Jersey, Florida, and California, as well as our New York Office. And as you read the following pages, you will see how he expanded the practice into areas not commonly reached by most immigration lawyers.

Even as a young man, Michael had a highly developed sense of responsibility, which led him to man a beat in Forest Hills, Queens, where we lived. His strong feelings of community responsibility brought him to join Hatzolah, a Jewish volunteer ambulance corps, a connection he has carried on for a quarter of a century, leaving his law office to join an ambulance crew and assist people in need of medical attention when he receives a call. This same sense of responsibility brought him into community work in Englewood, New Jersey, where he served as city councilman and then mayor for nearly a decade.

Also, perhaps rare in a former prosecutor, Michael has a strong belief in second chances. Much of our work involves people who, thanks to a previous brush with the law, find their prospects of achieving immigration status diminished. Like me, Michael believes that a person whose accomplishments can improve our country, whether in the creative world or commerce, should not be barred after paying a just debt to society.

And from John Lennon to Boy George, we have put that principle into action. I hope these ideas will span another generation. Two of Michael’s children are already law students at Cardozo and have recently attended his class.

No one should read this book in the expectation of discovering what a typical immigration lawyer does in a typical immigration practice. Michael Wildes is an extraordinary immigration
lawyer with a talent for doing the exceptional and accomplishing great things. He has earned and merited the well-deserved success for the highly unusual work depicted in these cases. With such a solid record of capability, I find myself looking to the future with confidence for additional outstanding achievements.

Leon Wildes
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