

Tribute to Jerome

***791** JEROME'S WISDOM

[Scott Lee \[FN1\]](#)

THE most powerful lesson Jerome taught me was that there are times in life when you should be strong. Avoiding confrontation by compromise was something I thought was preferable to standing my ground, but Jerome taught me that it is not always the best tool for communicating with adversaries. Sometimes you must stand up for what you believe in order to garner respect from people with whom you do business. One personal issue in which Jerome really provided wisdom was how to work with people who disagreed with my sexual orientation and who were especially uncomfortable with my openness about it. Jerome asserted that being openly gay in medical school was an opportunity for me to show people who had never met a gay person before, or who had but wished they had not, to reevaluate their prejudice independently. Jerome encouraged me not to 'hide' myself for anyone, but to be strong, even when some people at school not only disagreed with my sexuality but made it their job to try to prevent me from reaching my professional goals. I was not always as strong as Jerome--or I--had hoped, but he supported me through this difficult time. During our last year, when my anti-gay classmates wanted to smooth things over with me knowing they had failed to intimidate me or to stop me from finishing school, Jerome provided wisdom by reminding me that I had the option not to make up with them. Sometimes a stronger message is sent by ending with a clashing sound rather than with a harmonious resolution.

I am truly amazed and pleased with how much impact Jerome had on this world. His path has made my path, and paths taken by others in the future, easier and more comfortable. I will always remember Jerome telling me soon after we met that when he started his career as a law professor, you could fit all the African-American law professors in the nation in his living room and still have space for some furniture. What accomplishment and bravery to have achieved what Jerome and few others did.

One scholarly law professor and civil rights activist at New York University Jerome really respected was Derrick Bell, author of many books, including *Ethical Ambition: Living a Life of Meaning and Worth*. [\[FN1\]](#) Jerome gave an autographed copy of this book to me for my birthday, and I love it! 'I truly believe that in making honorable choices about our lives, we can acknowledge sacrifices we make and the risks we take and recognize that ***792** what others view as losses and foolhardiness are the nourishment upon which our spirits thrive,' [\[FN2\]](#) Bell writes--a message Jerome encouraged me to return to when faced with challenging situations, especially ones where others view honesty and openness as foolishness. Jerome was one of the most ethical people I have met, always searching for the potential for goodness in others and not settling for the easy solution during times of struggle. My favorite passage in Bell's book reminds me of my relationship with Jerome and his caring, kindness and wisdom, and how thankful I am he was a part of my life:

Our relationships serve as our ethical barometers, and the ability to participate in meaningful personal relationships, intimate relationships, and relationships with family, friends and colleagues is the cornerstone of ethical living. After all, what

binds us is not blood, marriage license, or formal commitment, but pleasure, caring, and the trust that ethical behavior has earned. [\[FN3\]](#)

Jerome, thank you so much. We will keep your spirit alive.

Footnotes:

[\[FN1\]](#). Scott Lee is a resident in Family Medicine at the University of Massachusetts and attended medical school at the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill. He has a Master of Science in Pathology from Duke University.

[\[FN1\]](#). See generally Derrick Bell, *Ethical Ambition; Living a Life of Meaning and Worth* (2002) (discussing how one can live ethical life).

[\[FN2\]](#). *Id.* at 11.

[\[FN3\]](#). *Id.* at 125.