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## Raley was a mentor to students, a voice for the innocent

By Marc Karlinsky  
Law Bulletin staff writer

[Jane E. Raley](#), the co-director of the Northwestern University School of Law's Center on Wrongful Convictions, built a legal career ensuring innocent people got a fair shot from behind bars.

Raley, 57, died last week in Highland Park following a battle with cancer.

Through her work with the center, Raley helped her imprisoned clients prove their innocence and get exonerated. She also trained legions of other lawyers to do the same.

Her colleagues said Raley reminded them of their responsibility as lawyers not only to represent clients fiercely in court but to relate to them personally.

"You can be both an outstanding and effective lawyer but also be incredibly compassionate and caring for people," said [Karen L. Daniel](#), a Northwestern law professor and the center's other co-director.

A 1982 graduate of Indiana University's Maurer School of Law, Raley joined the appellate defender's office in Springfield. There, she met [Jonathan C. Haile](#).

Haile and Raley were married a few years later, and they relocated to Chicago. Raley joined the appellate defender's Chicago office, while Haile became a federal prosecutor.

Raley took several years off to raise her two children before joining the Center on Wrongful Convictions in 2000.

She applied for that job jointly with Daniel, her longtime colleague from the appellate defender's office. The duo split time at the office while each raising their children, and both transitioned into full-time roles as the kids got older.

"Coming here, it just opened up new doors to find ways to exonerate our clients," Daniel said.

It's an emotional job with clients' freedom on the line, and Raley could connect with clients in a way many other attorneys could not, Daniel said.

“She was just a relentless fighter on behalf of her clients,” Daniel said, “but she was not afraid to cry with her clients or students, and she loved them.”

In a profession sometimes known for stoic characters, Daniel said Raley showed students it’s OK to be sad when things don’t go well and to personally commit to clients’ causes.

“As compassionate as she was, she was never a gullible type of lawyer as far as the assumptions she makes about her clients,” Haile said.

[Thomas F. Geraghty](#), the associate dean for clinical education at Northwestern and the Bluhm Legal Clinic’s director, said her ability to connect extended to all the parties in the courtroom.

“Many of the cases were hotly contested, but Jane could relate well to all the parties involved — prosecutors, judges,” Geraghty said. “She had a kind of commitment to her clients which was both technical and emotional, and yet she was able to speak to everybody involved in a very rational and compelling way.”

Even in an adversarial setting, Raley had the respect of prosecutors because of her diplomatic temperament, he said.

Although most students pursue paths in law outside of criminal defense work, Geraghty said Raley’s mentorship has caused many alumni to take similar cases as part of their pro bono caseloads. Many former law students have reached out to the center this week to share memories and experiences working with her.

“I think it’s fair to say she was an inspiration to all of us in this important work,” he said.

Beyond her professional accomplishments, Haile said his wife’s career was all the more impressive given her ability to balance it with raising their family.

“She was the one who was good with everything, with the kids and was the best mother you could ever imagine, the best wife you could ever imagine,” he said.

Northwestern has created a memorial fund in Raley’s honor. There will be a memorial service at 2 p.m. Saturday at the North Shore Unitarian Church, 2100 Half Day Road, Deerfield.

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