



## HANDOUT THREE: **RECOGNIZING HUMANITY THREAD, INTERVIEW ARCHIVE**

**Directions: Underline key phrases and new details as you watch and listen to the interviews.**

### **RANDY SUSSKIND**

I think when you do this kind of work watching Bryan, it does feel like it's something a little bit beyond just doing the legal work, that there is some aspect of it that feels like a ministry, that feels like we're doing something that is connecting with our clients beyond just the lawyering. "Here's your legal argument. I've reviewed the facts of your case and here's the best approach that we think we should take," and you can write them a client letter and send it off like that. But just generally, under the leadership of Bryan, we all had this sort of approach that we're treating people beyond the scope of the legal representation. It's more of a friendship, it's more of getting to know people as people, not just as clients.

And so yeah, we have lots of opportunities where we're talking to the clients' children, the family members, the mothers, and we're getting to know our clients beyond just what is necessary for the specific legal arguments that we're making in the cases. We know, because we have to investigate their life history in most of the death penalty cases, we know a lot about them and their personality and their development, both through investigation, but just in conversations. And it does feel like we're doing something beyond just being a lawyer. There's an extra human element, there's an extra compassion, there's just something else that's happening.

And we all feel that at EJI, and it starts from the top, the way Bryan approaches his relationship with clients that's fostered throughout the organization, and we all sort of follow his lead. And we all, I think, generally, are trying to make connections with our clients that go beyond the legal framework. We're meeting folks on death row, we're meeting our clients in prison, and we're having relationships at a human level. It's not just attorney-client kind of stuff.

### **SIA SANNEH**

Yeah. I mean, I was involved in my first year and a half in several cases where we were not able to save our client, and I think it's an impossible thing to prepare for and it's something that I think you never get past, I'll certainly never get past that. But I spent a day at the prison with a client the day that he was going to be executed and spent the day with his parents and have just, it's ... To me, this is now eight, nine, years ago, but it feels like yesterday. Some of these cases, they just never leave you. And I think one thing that has been so remarkable and devastating for me to experience is the gratitude that this client who I'm thinking of, expressed to me in his last day. I mean, he was hours away from facing execution and he was thanking us, thanking EJI for representing him, thanking us for trying to do what we could for him. And I think about those things because there's so much humanity and dignity that I've seen clients express in the face of a system that is so cruel and so absurd, and those moments have stayed with me more than anything else that I've experienced as a lawyer, because people's capacity for humanity and hope and resilience in the most difficult of circumstances is an extraordinary thing to experience and I think if you've been up close to that, it's hard to understand why we want to kill people. It really is. I mean I understand the historical roots of that and why that is such a strong impulse in American culture, but having gotten to know some of the men and women on death row, it's they have an extraordinary capacity for care and hope and thoughtfulness for each other.