

I met Pat Mahoney in the Fall of 2010. I had been helping in a first-grade classroom, and Pat was pushing a broom in the hall. I thought he was a volunteer janitor. Near the end of the year I met him under very different circumstances.

Our three-year-old grandson had been living with us. Neither of his parents were able to care for him. My son and daughter-in-law, both make poor decisions because of serious emotional and mental illness, had dropped him off at a police station the summer of 2008. He was 18 months old. However late 2010, his mom picked him up and decided to keep him. Her mental state was continuing to decline and her living arrangements chaotic. My husband and I decided to pursue custody. We contacted several attorneys. We could not find one willing to take our case. Illinois is a very conservative state. There had never been a successful case of grandparents being awarded custody of a child, unless the child had already experienced serious physical abuse while under the care of parents.

In late December 2010, I was standing in the hall outside the principal's office, my mind going in all directions. Ms. Lawlor, the principal then, walked up to me and asked me if there was anything she could do. I remember looking at her as if her words fell from the sky. I said, "Yes, I need an attorney in DuPage County." She laughed and told me that if I needed a Cook County attorney, she could easily hook me up, but she said she was going to give it some thought. That afternoon, she let me know that Pat Mahoney wanted to talk with me. I thanked her but wondered why the janitor wanted to talk to me.

Then I found out he wasn't the janitor! We went in to school library. I had an opportunity to see Pat morph to a high-power attorney. At the end, he gave me an attorney's name and number, told me to call him and be sure to make it clear to him that "Pat Mahoney sent me." I did. The attorney met with me the next day. He agreed to take our case, explained we had barely a leg to stand on and judges hated these kinds of case. I asked him why he agreed to help us. He just laughed, explaining "nobody turns down Pat Mahoney." And we were on our way.

We spent the next three years in court, three judges, three trials, two Guardian ad Litem, two appeals, including one to the Illinois Supreme Court, only to have our case dismissed. Our attorney stuck with us, eventually working out an agreement in March 2016, awarding us full permanent custody of our grandson. My grandson continues to work through issues related to his prior chaotic living arrangements but is thriving in school and clubs, especially sports. He is growing into a fine young man.

Pat Mahoney never met my grandson, and didn't really know me, but his kindness enabled my grandson to live in a home where he is safe and loved. Pat Mahoney inspired me to become a kinder person. He changed all our lives for the better.