

## Chapter 1

# Watching Haircuts on a Saturday Night

I was going on *The Barry Gray Show* one evening in early December 1970 and I must say I was pleased. I had been on local radio shows in Rockland County and I had even been on a Sunday morning talk show on TV in New York, but *The Barry Gray Show* was a highbrow radio talk show, targeted to late evening intellectuals who scorn TV. It was a definite first for me.

I had been elected District Attorney of Rockland County back in 1965 in what was considered locally a big upset. A Democrat hadn't held the office since 1911, so I became mildly famous in the county just for getting myself elected. However, this fame stopped very sharply at the county line. In fact, most people in New York City weren't quite sure where Rockland County was, and they certainly didn't know who I was.

There were two other guests on the show that night: Peter Vallone, a politician from New York City who planned to challenge Herman Badillo for Congress, and Giraud Chester, who had written a new book entitled *The Ninth Juror*, about his own experience as a juror on a murder trial in New York City.

I was introduced to the other guests and to Barry Gray just before we went on the air at 11:30 p.m. They all seem to know each other, or at least acted like they did, but I had never met any of them before and, although they were very pleasant, I got the impression that they wondered why I was on this New York City-oriented show—I did too.

We went into the small studio and I was impressed that the microphones looked like something out of *The Big Broadcast of 1938*. It was a

semi-circular set up with Gray in the middle. Each of us had an individual microphone and we sat down at little tables facing each other. Gray had a headset on so he could hear his cues but other than that, it was all the same.

The show went on the air and the first thing Barry Gray did was introduce each of his guests and identify who they were. The other two were introduced first and after their introductions, Peter Vallone and Mr. Chester both said, “Good evening, glad to be with you,” or words to that effect. When he got to me, Gray said, “And lastly we have Robert Meehan, who is the District Attorney of Rockland County.” I was a little more nervous than I thought. My response was simply to nod at the microphone, which I suppose is not the best radio form.

Gray started his informal talk with Giraud Chester, asking many questions about his book and the actual trial he had sat on. Then he went to Pete Vallone and the problems of Queens and the South Bronx. After a few minutes of the ghetto problems, it was back to Chester. I thought he wasn’t even going to get to me, but he did.

Right after the second commercial break, Gray turned, looked at me dead pan, and said, “What do you do up there in Rockland County?” A monumental question, but I was prepared to start an answer when he immediately broke in and continued, “You know I’ve had district attorneys on the show, but I never had a ‘Hayseed DA’ on before. I figure that up there in Rockland County you sit around and watch haircuts on Saturday nights, just for something to do!”

I thought to myself, “Holy mackerel, I should have stuck to my late night TV movies, which I so dearly love.” But strangely enough, the rest of the show went rather well and when it was over an hour or so later, I liked Barry Gray and I kind of thought he liked me.



I’ve always remembered those lines of Barry Gray and they never offend me, because after all, I suppose I am something of a hayseed. My clothes never seem to quite fit, my shoes are scuffed, my ears tend to stick out a bit, and my hair always appears a little in disarray, even after I comb it. In short, I lack the polish and manner that anyone would associate with a “Mr. District Attorney” figure.

However, I am writing now because I want people to know that even us “Hayseeds” do have our interesting moments. I suppose I could start with that very day of *The Barry Gray Show*. The day began with a phone call that woke me from my usual sound sleep at 4:30 that morning. But better yet, let me tell you how it all began.

One month earlier, at about 7:30 in the evening, a gas station in Sloatsburg, New York, had been held up at gunpoint. The twenty-one-year-old attendant, who was working alone in the station, had not only been robbed of the day’s receipts but was kidnapped by the holdup man and his girlfriend (or “Moll,” as we should call her). They put him in the trunk of their car and headed north on the New York State Thruway. Four hours later the young attendant’s body was found lying face down a few feet off the shoulder of the Thruway, fifty-five miles to the north in Ulster County. Two .45-caliber bullets had entered the back of his skull. This was a brutal murder.

Four days after that, another young gas station attendant in nearby Mahwah in Bergen County, New Jersey, was held up and murdered by two shots from a .45-caliber weapon—according to ballistics, the same .45.

To the hardened citizens of New York City or Detroit or Los Angeles, this may be the type of news they have come to accept. In our corner of the world, it was a nightmare; a vicious killer was on the loose. The jurisdiction for prosecution was in Bergen County, New Jersey, for the Mahwah killing and Ulster County, New York, for the murder of the Sloatsburg attendant. In the state of New York, jurisdiction lies where the body is found if it is not known where the murder actually occurred, as was the case in the first days of the investigation. Hence, Ulster got the case.

An around-the-clock investigation went forward, led by the New York State Police from the Kingston Barracks in Ulster County, the Bergen County Prosecutor’s Office, the Ramapo Police Department, and my office from Rockland County because of our deep involvement and concern.



A break came several days after the Mahwah killing. One Laura Mancini, out of conscience or fear or both, came forward and said that she had accompanied one John Barkley, age thirty, of Mahwah, New Jersey, on his murderous junkets in both Rockland and Bergen counties. Barkley was

described as a bearded, Caucasian man who was tall and heavy-set. She told authorities in graphic detail of the robberies and senseless killings. Yes, very senseless, because neither attendant had in anyway attempted to thwart the robbery.

The killing on the New York Thruway was the sorrier of the two. As Laura reported, John Barkley successfully robbed the station of \$82 but then for no apparent reason, and in rather good spirits, insisted at gunpoint that the young attendant get in the trunk of the car. As they drove north, Laura said that John was in the best of humor and joking as she pleaded that they let the boy go free. They finally stopped on the Thruway shoulder just south of Kingston and John got out, opened the trunk, and let the young man out. With the gun in his hand, Barkley stood there with Laura and his victim in the dim light of his taillights and, with a broad smile, told the boy, "I guess I'd better kill you!" It seemed like such a joke that the boy smiled and kidded back and Laura felt surely he would let him go. But John turned away for a moment and the boy, who was not tied up in anyway, turned and ran south along the shoulder, away from the car. John, seeing this, turned and ran after him and just before he caught up with him, fired two shots into the back of his head.

The full meaning of Barkley's jovial, happy-go-lucky mood did not really have meaning to me until I was to come face-to-face with it, standing alone only a few short days later.



Laura Mancini not only handed Barkley up on both murders, but she set in motion the biggest manhunt in the history of Rockland County. She told where John was hiding out, in a summer cabin in the foothills of the Ramapo Mountains in Hillburn, New York, near the New Jersey State line.

As the police closed in, John retreated into the rough terrain of the Ramapos on one of the first bitter cold nights of the season at the end of November.

Having made his initial escape into the mountains, the manhunt began in earnest with New York and New Jersey State Police and many local Rockland County police departments, led by the Ramapo Police, fanning out into the dark, cold, and rugged mountains.

The story was front-page news. The second day the banner headline of the local Rockland daily paper, the *Journal News*, read, "KILLER

STALKED IN RAMAPOS.” The third day the headline screamed, “POLICE CLOSE IN ON BARKLEY.” The fourth day I received the telephone call.

When the phone rang at our house after 1 a.m. in those days, it was either 1) a police department reporting a serious crime, 2) the local press working on a morning deadline, or 3) and the most frequent, someone a little worse for alcohol, calling to let his district attorney know just what he thought of him. For this reason, my dear wife, Nancy, was assigned to screen all such calls. With the police and the press, she was great—with the tipplers, she was not.

“Bob, this one sounds like she really needs help,” or “Oh, you’ve got to take it, he sounds desperate.”

Nancy is a compassionate girl, but a judge of slurred speech she is not. After answering the phone at 4:30 that morning, Nancy said, “Bob, it’s young Joe St. Lawrence and he says it’s very important.” Joe was then about twenty-one years old and owned his own motorcycle shop in Sloatsburg, but more important, he was the son of my high school football coach from days gone by at Suffern High School.

I took the call and Joe got right to the point. He knew John Barkley as a regular customer at his cycle shop and John had just called him to say that he wanted to surrender, but he would only surrender to me and I must be alone with no other law enforcement officers. My first thought was, “Why me?” But my first question was, “Where is he?”

St. Lawrence said he truly did not know, that Barkley had only told him he was more than two hundred miles away and that he wouldn’t tell him unless Meehan accepted the deal to come alone. Barkley told Joe that he would call back in an hour for an answer. Without hesitation, I told him the deal of going alone was out, that as district attorney, I did not even have the power of a peace officer to make arrests and, besides, I wasn’t a complete fool. I would, however, personally meet him with one of my investigators from the District Attorney’s Office.

We then got to the issue of “Why me?” and why through St. Lawrence. The answer really surprised me. It seems without realizing it until that minute, I knew John Barkley and he knew and apparently liked me.



It had begun over eight years earlier. I had just bought my house on Cherry Lane in the little hamlet of Tallman. It was one of those develop-

ment deals with practically nothing down and almost everything beyond a roof over your head was what they called an “extra.” Since I had just passed the bar exam and had four daughters, the oldest age five, I could barely conjure up the \$700 or \$800 needed for the down payment and closing costs, so there would be no “extras.” Unlike others who say that, and then get caught up in the world of a new house, I meant it. That meant that for landscaping we got the standard three scrawny little bushes and that was all. I told Nancy that all of those nice things would come in due time, and they did.

We still live in that house on Cherry Lane. Instead of eight rooms it has twelve, instead of a six-by-eighteen-foot deck made of two-by-fours, we have a twelve-by-twenty-two-foot closed-in and heated porch with a fourteen-by-twenty-foot swimming pool attached, and we must have fifty trees and shrubs in the yard. Nancy and I, along with the kids, did it all ourselves and, therefore, we love it all the more.

The improvement of Cherry Lane all began in the summer of 1961 when we went to Barkley’s Nursery in Upper Saddle River, New Jersey, for a sale where they were selling shrubs and little evergreen trees at about \$2 or \$3 a piece. Barkley’s was just south of the New Jersey border and not far from our house, and so we went there several times that summer and in the summers that followed. We always went in my beat up old Ford station wagon and the kids went with us, and it was a happy time, especially for Nancy. I was the carpenter, the electrician, the plumber, and the mechanic, but she was—and is—the gardener.

I can well remember that second summer when we went back and the owner’s big handsome young son made a fuss over our newest addition. We had of course had our annual baby, but this one’s name was Tommy. We were all so proud of our only boy. Mr. Barkley was proud of his son, too. His name was John.



The twenty-two-year-old was now thirty and feared for his life; the happy days were behind him. He was sure that those police that stalked him in the mountains would kill him if he tried to surrender to them. He was wrong; I knew most of them on a first-name basis and they wouldn’t have. But John in desperation had made his escape by crossing the mountains and heading west.

I told Joe to let John Barkley know that my word was good; that he must allow me to bring an investigator and let us know where he was. Joe believed me and he was sure that John would, too. Barkley had made St. Lawrence the middleman because he knew of the great friendship between the Meehans and the St. Lawrences. Joe was to call me back as soon as John Barkley returned his call.

I immediately called one of my investigators who lived only a mile away and asked him to come right away with no questions asked. Eric Vrhel arrived at the house about six minutes later; that's the kind of guy he is.

I explained the whole set up to Eric and damned if he didn't know the Barkleys, too. I should've realized it; he had worked several years before as a police officer in Upper Saddle River. Both of us felt a little ridiculous for not having realized who this arch-criminal from Hackensack was.

Eric had one disagreement with me. There must be two peace officers to bring in a fugitive and we must have someone from Ulster County where there was an open murder warrant. I knew immediately that he was right. I picked up the phone and called St. Lawrence and told him to tell John that I would have to be accompanied by *two* men. He didn't like it but would pass it on to John when he called.

Eric and I sat there and waited. Nancy had gotten up and made coffee. She didn't know what was going on, but she knew it was important and she knew enough not to ask. "Need to know" was a vital part of our business. In retrospect, I realize how hard that must have been for Nancy. But she understood my job and has always supported my decisions.

Sure enough, just after 5:30 the phone rang again. This time I answered it myself and it was Joe St. Lawrence. John had balked at two men, but would go along with one. He told Joe what city he was in under a pledge that Joe wouldn't tell us. Joe also had a phone booth number to call back and that was also to be kept from us. I didn't press St. Lawrence to break his word to Barkley but I was adamant, it must be on our terms with two men or not at all.

I suggested that Joe come to my house, place the call out of our presence, and then, after explaining my position, let me personally talk to John. Joe thought this was a good idea; he arrived at the house within fifteen minutes and the call was placed. Joe talked to John for about three minutes and then called me to the phone. John was willing to talk to me. Before I picked up the telephone, I looked Joe St. Lawrence hard in the

eye and said, “One thing Joe, are you morally certain that’s John Barkley’s voice on the phone?”

“Absolutely, Mr. Meehan, I’d know it any place.”

Alright, I’d talk to him. I knew that I must be firm but I tried to act casual. I explained the need for two men, gave my personal assurance as to his safety if he surrendered peacefully, and he quickly backed down and agreed to my terms. I then asked where he was and he still wouldn’t say.

“John, how can we come get you if we don’t know where you are?”

“Mr. Meehan, let me talk to Joe Saint again.”

I put Joe back on the phone and he and John rather cleverly worked out a plan. When Joe hung up he said, “He’s in Cleveland, that’s all I’ll tell you now. When we get to Cleveland, I’ll call to make sure he’s still there, and then I’ll tell you his exact location. By the way, he also insists that I be there.”

I was certain that Joe St. Lawrence was sincere and not part of any devious plan, but as a betting man I would have given long odds against John Barkley surrendering to us in Cleveland. It had first occurred to me that it might have been a desperate attempt by one of Barkley’s friends to call off the massive manhunt in the Ramapo Mountains by convincing us he was far away in Cleveland. With Joe’s assurance that it was his voice and further verification that the phone call had in fact been made to an area code 216 number, my fears of a complete hoax were somewhat relieved, but I was still very skeptical. It occurred to me that a man who had needlessly, and yes rather sadistically, ended the lives of two young men may not be trustworthy. He might also enjoy the prospect of making a fool out of the DA by sending him on a fruitless trip to Cleveland while he headed out of town. Worse yet, he could be waiting for us in ambush.

However, I was also certain that if John Barkley had truly managed to escape the human dragnet in the Ramapos, our chances of capturing him were getting slimmer. Some killers want to surrender—precious few, but we had to take the chance that this might be the one.



So I put the wheels in motion toward Cleveland, Ohio. First call was to my secretary or “Girl Friday,” Ann Hickey.

“Annie, no questions asked, four round-trip tickets to Cleveland, one one-way ticket from Cleveland to New York, deal directly with the



airline. Let's see, it's now almost 6 a.m., any flight after 8:30. Return flight time to be decided. Get back to me in twenty minutes."

"Yes, Boss."

I would have insulted her if I had said, "This is confidential," or anything of the kind. She knew it without me saying it.

Next call, Charlie Purcell, senior state police investigator assigned to Rockland County and one of the best cops I've ever met.

"Charlie, Bob Meehan. We just may have our boy, John Barkley, lined up. I need a man from Kingston Barracks to make the collar." Charlie wanted a few details; I gave him very few and left it at, "Trust me." He did.

I should have made one more call. I didn't. It was a mistake not to.

At 6:15, Ann called back. We were confirmed for United Flight 617 leaving LaGuardia at 9:42 a.m. to arrive nonstop Cleveland International at 11:14, return flight open.

"Thanks, Annie. Tell them at the office that I won't be in today. Something has come up on a wiretap and I've got to see Mr. Hogan in New York. Eric will be with me and, by the way, even though you don't know what the hell's going on, wish us luck." She did but not until she had gotten me to promise to call as soon as I could let her know what all the cloak and dagger was about.

At about 6:30, Senior State Police Investigator Charles Teelon called to say he had talked to Purcell, had cleared it with his boss, and was available. I told him to be at LaGuardia Airport by 9:15 and I would fill him in.

Eric went home to get dressed. I took a shower and got ready, and by 7:30 Eric was back to pick me up to head for LaGuardia. Joe St. Lawrence was also back at the house ready to go. Everyone was calm with the exception of one Nancy Ann Meehan.

"OK, Nance, wish me luck."

"Aren't you even going to tell me where you are going?"

"No."

"Well, when will you be back?"

"I don't know."

"Well, won't you at least call?"

"Yes, I'll call as soon as possible."

I bent down to give her a quick kiss on the cheek and then we headed for the airport, with no overnight bag, no briefcase, no toothbrush, just a copy of *The Ninth Juror*. If I could make it back in time for *The Barry*

*Gray Show*, I was damned if I was going to sit and be interviewed with that man without having finished his book.

We met Investigator Teelon at the airport at 9:10. I should have told him that the plane left at 9:42, not 9:15. That was just a meeting time. He had left Kingston Barracks in an unmarked radio car at 7:55 and with much assistance from Troop T, New York State Police Thruway Patrol, had made the 102-mile trip in one hour and twelve minutes, which is breaking par for even the police course.

The air trip was uneventful. The others did little talking as I sat and tried to read more of *The Ninth Juror*. My problem was that I couldn't keep my mind on the book. My thoughts kept wandering back to John Barkley. Hopefully, within a few hours I would be seeing this boy again, whom I had only known as a friendly young man. But now he was a killer and must be treated as such, and I was DA and must act accordingly.

My primary concern must be the safety and peace of mind of the people of my county, my state, and our neighboring state of New Jersey. It was a time to be firm but fair, tough but compassionate. I said a prayer that I would be up to it.



We arrived in Cleveland about five minutes ahead of schedule. Joe went directly to a phone booth, made the call, was back in three minutes, and said, "OK, he's in room 393 at the Cleveland YMCA on Prospect Street and he'll wait for us there."

The chances of a wild goose chase had diminished, the danger had not. I then told Eric and Charlie that we would now have to check in with the Cleveland Police Department. I purposely hadn't brought this up before because I didn't want to look foolish contacting the Cleveland Police Department if this had proven a wasted trip and I also didn't want St. Lawrence getting upset about more men involved. But as I explained to him, we would make the arrest and then immediately bring in the Cleveland men because they were necessary for a waiver of extradition from Ohio back to New York. Joe accepted this more easily than I would have thought.

We went to the substation of the police department at the airport and met with detectives George Monaghan and Peter Conklin. We identified ourselves, told our story, and gained their immediate and complete cooperation. Within twenty minutes we were pulling out of the airport

parking lot in an unmarked radio car, heading for the YMCA downtown, and hopefully our meeting with John Barkley. We had devised a mutually agreeable plan that went completely according to plan—until it didn't.

We parked about a block from the YMCA and Detective Monaghan went alone to see the YMCA manager and get an idea of the floor plan and the exact location of room 393, as well as the exit stairs and fire escapes. Monaghan was back in about fifteen minutes; the setup was good. Room 393 was near the center of the hallway, about three doors from the elevator. There were no fire escapes out the window of Room 393, but there were fire exits at both ends of the hall.

It was decided that Monaghan would be at one fire exit and Conklin at the other. They would walk up the stairs to get to their location. Charlie, Eric, and Joe would go up on the elevator. Charlie would stay at the elevator door, then they would signal that they were all in place, at which time Eric and Joe would approach the door to Room 393. Joe was to station himself flat against the wall next to the door toward the elevator, away from the hinge of the door, and hopefully out of harm's way. Eric was to knock on the door and then step back against the wall in the other direction with gun drawn. If Barkley called out as to who was there, St. Lawrence was to identify himself and stand fast.

Since I was not a peace officer, I could not be in on the actual collar, so Eric and Charlie insisted that I wait downstairs at the desk in the lobby. I wasn't going to stand still for this until Eric, who is more than a friend, said, "What do you want to be, a fucking hero? Let us do our job. It's bad enough having St. Lawrence up there." I reluctantly agreed.

Five minutes later, we were pulling up in front of the YMCA. The Y is a big, ornate old building with a very large lobby, something out of the turn of the century. The two Cleveland detectives entered first and went directly to the stairways. Charlie, Eric, and Joe entered just ahead of me and headed for the elevator.

I entered and went straight to the desk and flashed my badge and credentials to the elderly clerk. I told him that this was a police emergency and I was to be handed the phone immediately when a call came in on the switchboard from Room 393. Eric had agreed to call from the room as soon as Barkley was in custody and I was to head right up. I then stepped back from the desk, lit a cigarette, and waited. I didn't have to wait long.



“Mr. Meehan?” I heard a voice right behind me. I turned quickly and stared right into the face of Big John Barkley—all six feet, four inches and 250 pounds of him.

I was momentarily stunned looking at his broad smile and outstretched hand. All I could think of was Laura Mancini’s account of his smiling face and geniality moments before he fired two fatal shots into the head of the young gas station attendant.

I recovered quickly, gave him a very firm handshake, and said, “John Barkley, how the hell are you?”

“I’m fine Mr. Meehan, but after all that talk on the telephone, I’m surprised that you came alone.”

I thought to myself, “God, this is ridiculous.” My three armed men were a long, two stories above us while John and I were in the lobby along with about a dozen YMCA guests, mostly senior citizens, scattered about the large room, reading or dozing in their large heavy leather chairs, oblivious to the drama that was taking place a few feet away. The desk clerk, who was the closest to us, was perhaps the most senior of all and could not be expected to help.

I was unarmed. It was never my practice to carry a gun. I looked searchingly at John’s rumpled, casual attire as we shook hands. I was looking for the telltale bulge of a .45. Seeing none, I relaxed slightly.

“Well, John,” I continued with a fixed smile, “actually, I didn’t come alone. Joe Saint and one of my guys just went up to the room looking for you. They should be back down in just a minute.”

With the same set smile, I turned to the desk clerk and said, “Let me know when that call comes in.”

John was telling me how happy he was to see me and asking about the family. In fact the conversation was eerily reminiscent of standing in front of Barkley’s Nursery those many years before.

I thought to myself, I have no choice but to play the hand that’s dealt me. I’ll just continue this small talk and hope for the best. So for the next several endless minutes, John and I stood there and did just that, made small talk.

“How are the children? They must be getting big. How’s the boy doing with all those sisters?”

I told him they were fine and growing and that young Tommy now had a little brother. John thought that was great—but still the desk phone didn’t ring.

“How do you like being DA, Mr. Meehan? I bet it’s a lot different than being a regular lawyer.” I thought to myself, “It sure is!” The talk went on as the phone lay silent. I kept my answers short, my voice relaxed and friendly, but I stayed determinedly away from any reference to the reason I had come to Cleveland that day.

Anyone overhearing our conversation would have been certain that it was just two old friends meeting again. As the minutes passed I began to see the irony and maybe even the humor in the situation. John Barkley, crazed killer, wily eluder of the Ramapo manhunt, was surrendering peacefully to me alone—just as he had wanted to. I pictured the carefully planned operation on the third floor, the well-placed armed men, guns drawn, ready for any contingency. Except one that is—that John would be downstairs in the lobby chatting with me. All our *Dragnet* and *Adam 12* plans had gone up in the quiet afternoon smoke of the vintage YMCA lobby.

Finally, a long ten minutes later, the call came from Eric. His voice was tense. “Bob, he’s not here. We finally managed to get into the room, but he’s gone.”

With Barkley standing only a few feet away and able to hear me, I acted like I was talking to Joe St. Lawrence, and said, “Joe, come on down, just you and Eric. I met John down here in the lobby just after you went up. He’s fine and says he’s looking forward to seeing you—OK, see you in a minute.” I then whispered into the phone quickly, “No drawn gun.”

Two minutes later, Joe and Eric got off the elevator and approached us. John was still smiling as I said, “Eric, you remember John Barkley?” Eric said sure and everyone shook hands all around, much like you would greet an old friend at the Elks Club.

Then Charlie and Detectives Monaghan and Conklin approached us and it was more good fellowship and smiling handshakes. But we now had a ring of men, arms concealed, surrounding John Barkley. I was feeling a hell of a lot better, and with a more genuine smile on my face said, “John, these fellows are from the Cleveland Police Department. They’re going to help us cut through the red tape so you can go back to New York with us tonight.” This was just fine with John so we all headed out the door of the YMCA. Eric and Detective Monaghan quickly frisked John on the sidewalk before the seven of us squeezed into the unmarked car and headed for police headquarters. As I suspected by that time, he was clean.

I’m sure that the desk clerk wondered later about my flashing the badge and the “police emergency” bit. Neither he nor anyone else in the

lobby that afternoon could have realized the purpose of our brief visit to the Cleveland YMCA. Handcuffs were not in evidence until they were placed on John in the police car, but they then of course had to be used.



The booking and extradition process began immediately. Within two hours, we had been before a Cleveland city judge, all paperwork was done, and we were free to head back to New York.

We made no attempt to question John as to the homicides or to get a written statement. That was part of our agreement made on the phone that morning, and more important since John wanted it that way—part of the Constitution of the United States.

At the police station, I made four calls. The second was to the District Attorney of Ulster County, my friend Joe Toracca, who was pleased to hear the news. The third call was to the Prosecutor's Office in Bergen County, New Jersey, where the reception was less than friendly. They were burned up because they hadn't been in on the arrest.

The last call was to Ann Hickey at the Rockland County District Attorney's Office. She was her usual happy enthusiastic self as I started to tell the story, but when I finished with the scene in the lobby of the YMCA, I expected her to laugh, but she didn't. "Well, Annie, don't you think it's a little bit comical?"

"No, I don't think it's the least bit amusing when one of my men takes a chance on getting himself killed."

I thought to myself, she's saying, "One of my men." I'm the district attorney but that crazy Annie thinks she's the boss. The trouble is that she was right—she ran that office. Ann was the only one who knew all the cases in all the courts, and more important, when and where they were and who was supposed to be there. As far as administration, budgets, salaries, and such, forget it, Annie ran the whole thing. Although at that time just a few years short of being a grandmother, Ann was young in appearance and certainly young at heart. She loved the District Attorney's Office and it was mutual.

"Look, Annie," I continued, "calm down. We are all fine. As it turned out there was no real danger." I then told her that the matter was still confidential, but to be prepared to alert the local press and that I would call her again when we knew our flight arrangements back. The last thing

I said to Ann was, “First thing, call Nancy, tell her I’m fine, the case I’m working on is going well, I’ll be home tonight, but that’s all you tell her.”

The first call I made from Cleveland that afternoon was the one I should have made before I left in the morning. Chief Joseph Miele of the Ramapo Police Department, a friend of a lifetime who graduated just a few years ahead of me at Suffern High School. I told the chief that we had Barkley in tow in Cleveland and that the search in the cold, dreary mountains could be called off. He wasn’t mad, but I could sense that he was disappointed not to have been in on things; maybe even hurt that I hadn’t trusted to call him. I explained that everything happened so fast that morning and that we couldn’t call the search off in case it was a giant hoax. He knew and I knew that the explanation for not calling him personally was insufficient.



Detective Monaghan drove us back out to Cleveland International in the same unmarked car. On this trip, John was handcuffed. Our flight was leaving at 4:45 p.m. and was due at LaGuardia at 7:50 New York time. We arrived at the airport just past four o’clock and we all went into the police substation.

In the station, I told them to remove the handcuffs, and then I said, “John, you trusted me and I think it’s fair to say that I didn’t let you down, is that right?”

“Sure, Mr. Meehan, you’ve really been a friend.”

I then said, to the dismay of my men and Detective Monaghan, “OK John, I’ll trust you. You’re going on that plane just like any other passenger with no handcuffs. You’ll be sitting three abreast with Eric on one side of you and Charlie on the other. Remember they are both armed. Can you handle it, can I trust you, John?”

“Absolutely, Mr. Meehan. I’m relieved that this is over. There’s no chance I’ll make trouble.”

“OK, then that’s the way it will be.” Eric’s expression bespoke his disagreement, but the stubborn German knew the stubborn Irishman well enough by that time to know in fact that was the way it would be.

We boarded United Flight 426 a few minutes early and I informed the captain of who I was and that two of my men were armed. That was just before the days of metal detectors and we didn’t have to tell him,

but we wanted the captain and his crew to know that there were police officers on board with a prisoner in case trouble developed in flight. I made no mention of what the prisoner was charged with and the captain never asked.

It was a Friday afternoon and the plane, a DC-8, was full. But we arrived early enough that, without asking for preferential treatment, we were able to get the three seats abreast. I was in the aisle seat just behind Eric, with Joe St. Lawrence beside me in the center seat.

I guess it was a Friday afternoon, but the passengers and stewardesses appeared to be in particularly good humor, as was the passenger in seat M23, big John Barkley.

It was just getting dark and the lights of the city of Cleveland below, with its blanket of snow, made the city seem much warmer and friendlier than it had been when we approached in a midday overcast only a few hours before. Maybe it was the events of the day, but I felt so much more relaxed as we became airborne than I had in landing.

The “No Smoking” light had been out for about four seconds when the stewardesses started at the front of the tourist section taking orders for cocktails. Just before the stewardess got to the row head of me, Eric poked his head around the seat and said with a marked frown, “Hey boss, our friend here wants to know if he can have a drink.”

I said, “What the hell, Eric, we only live once. It may be a long time between drinks for John. Let him have it.” To which Eric responded with a smile, “I thought you’d say that.” Since it was tourist, there were no free drinks, so I offered to buy a round for all of us. Eric and Charlie declined. Charlie is a hell of a nice guy and not the least bit stiff, but New York State Police regulations are, and he wasn’t about to break them. As for Eric, I told him that it was OK with me, but he replied, “Come on boss, this isn’t supposed to be a pleasure trip, I am on duty!” And so he was.

I started to settle back to complete *The Ninth Juror*, while sipping my drink, when suddenly John Barkley stood up, turned to me with his glass held high, smiling broadly, and said for all to hear, “Here’s to you Mr. Meehan. You are a saint!”

I had to hold back a smile as I said, “Sit down, you crazy bastard.”

When we arrived over the New York area there was heavy air traffic and we were in a holding pattern for about half an hour. By this time almost all the passengers seemed in good spirits and I guess several had downed a second or a third drink. While we were in the holding pat-



tern, Eric again turned to me, “This son of a bitch wants another drink.” I leaned forward and whispered, “Absolutely not, I’m not delivering a drunken prisoner to the barracks tonight.” Eric grinned, “You’re finally getting smart boss.”

We landed at LaGuardia, waited for every other passenger to leave the plane, and then we left. We thanked the captain and as we did John piped up and told him what a smooth flight it had been and, with the usual smile, heartily shook the captain’s hand.

A marked state police car was waiting for us. Charlie took his prisoner, John Barkley, in handcuffs with two uniformed troopers in the marked car. Eric, Joe, and I followed in the DA’s car with both of us heading to the State Police Barracks at Stony Point in Rockland County.

I had called Ann Hickey from the airport in Cleveland and told her to alert the local press and radio to be at the Stony Point Barracks at 9 p.m. for a major announcement in the Barkley case.



It was raining when we arrived at Stony Point a little less than an hour later, but as we pulled in there was a small crowd of reporters and policemen waiting for us. The flashbulbs clicked in the rainy night and we immediately took John into the back room where he was formally mugged and printed.

I went out to the front desk where I talked to the reporters, all of whom I knew on a first-name basis. I told the story in a matter of fact way, starting with the call at 4:25 that morning. I did say that John wanted to surrender to me because he knew me from years before at the nursery, but as to his actual surrender, I only said, “John Barkley, after advising of his location, surrendered to us quietly in the lobby of the YMCA in Cleveland, Ohio, at 1:05 this afternoon.”

There were a couple of hostile questions as to why I had allowed the men to continue to comb the Ramapo Mountains throughout the morning and early afternoon if I knew he was in Cleveland. I answered that I couldn’t take a chance on the whole Cleveland adventure being a hoax and they readily accepted this.

Two detectives from Bergen County, New Jersey, were there along with Billy Sinclair, Chief of Detectives of the Ramapo Police Department, and two of his men. Sinclair, whom I’ve known for thirty years and greatly

respect, was not happy nor were his two men, but they did treat me well, congratulating me and being generally friendly.

I learned more of the inner feelings of the police who had been on the mountain that day about ten days later from my eleven-year-old daughter, Kathleen. A police sergeant of the town of Ramapo had given a lecture to her sixth grade class on the workings of the police department. Apparently the subject got around to the Barkley case.

That evening, Kathy said to me, “Daddy, the policeman who talked to us today said that you were drinking martinis on an airplane while all the men were up in the mountains freezing to death looking for the murderer.”

I said, “Kath, that’s not true, I was drinking *one* Manhattan!”



The two detectives from New Jersey, neither of whom I had ever met before, were a different story. They were openly angry that they had not been called in and said so. I was mildly apologetic and said I did what I thought was best. But they would not drop it and continued their criticism and said of the Bergen County prosecutor, “Our boss is really pissed off!”

Then, as I do only five or six times a year, I blew. “Well, you tell him to go fuck himself. I loved your old boss, Guy Callissi, but I’ve called this new SOB six times in the last year and he’s never even had the courtesy to return my call! Don’t push it boys—you’re in my territory now. In about two minutes, I’m going to have you thrown out of here.”

At this point, Eric stepped between us and said to the New Jersey men, “Come on fellows, I think you better leave now.” They did with no further words spoken.

As quickly as I get mad, I get over it and a few minutes later, over a container of coffee in the squad room, I was telling the Stony Point troopers the actual story of the arrest and they laughed like they thought it was as funny as I did. Maybe they were just being polite, but it really seemed humorous at the time. And besides, the troopers were feeling good that night. As unhappy as New Jersey and, to some degree, the Ramapo Police Department may have been, the state police were happy and proud to have been involved. The fact that it was a man from Kingston barracks, not Stony Point, made no difference—it was all New York State Police.

Charlie then came in and said they were going to leave for Ulster County with Barkley in a couple of minutes and Barkley wanted to thank me. I walked out to the holding cell and said goodbye to John Barkley. He was still smiling, but not so exuberantly as before. He thanked me for helping him and I said one last thing to him.

“John, I have friends who knew that boy from Sloatsburg that you killed and you’re going to have to pay for that. But I did know you and your family in better times and for that reason this is a doubly sad case for me personally. I can’t wish you luck, I don’t want you to beat the rap, but somehow, someway, I hope you can find peace with yourself.” We shook hands through the cell bars and then I kind of sadly went back into the squad room. That was the last time I ever saw John Barkley.



Later, Joe shared some details he had learned in his conversations with Barkley. John had been hiding in the Ramapo Mountains for days—without socks or underwear—and almost froze to death while crossing a river. He came down from the mountains in the Sloatsburg area and saw a flatbed truck with a tarpaulin cover parked at a Hot Shoppes restaurant. He crawled under the cover and hid as the driver returned and proceeded to drive to Ohio. Once there, John decided he was just too tired to run anymore and called Joe. In addition to asking Joe to reach out to me, he also asked Joe to bring socks and underwear for him to Cleveland.

Joe also recalled that after I allowed him to have the drink on the plane, John turned to him and said, “I guess this is probably the last time I’ll ever have one of these.”



Eric and I left Stony Point and headed to New York City for *The Barry Gray Show*. You’ve already heard about that, except I do remember during the show that the talk got around to air travel and I did say, “I flew to Cleveland today to pick up a prisoner, but I seldom travel outside of the county on business. My men do most extraditions without me.” Barry Gray rightly saw nothing interesting in that statement and the subject changed.



As I now sit in my den on Cherry Lane thinking of that day, I can look out at the little evergreens from Barkley's Nursery, which are now even with the second-story windows. John Barkley is in the seventh year of a life sentence at the New York State Prison at Attica. There is an open murder charge against him in Bergen County that has never been prosecuted. Very importantly, New Jersey had the death penalty; New York did not.

But as has been the habit of a lifetime, I look back on that day and I don't think of what I may have done right. Instead, I ask myself, what did I do wrong and how can I avoid making the same mistake tomorrow?

I should have called Chief Joe Miele that morning and told him of my contact with Barkley. One of his men didn't have to go; they had no open charge. He could've kept his men ringing the mountains until we were sure that the Cleveland story was true. But they would have been in on it, they would have been part of it. When my own hometown police department, my friends of a lifetime, had their pride on the line I let them down. Two and a half years later, when my life was on the line, they didn't let me down.