

THE DAILY VOICE

Westport Father, Son Collaborate On Civil-Rights Film 'Marshall'

By **Meredith Guinness** 02/11/2016

WESTPORT, Conn. — In the pre-dawn hours of a chilly December night in 1940, two truckers saw a soaking wet woman limping near Westchester County's Kensico Reservoir.

Taking her in, they listened as Greenwich socialite Eleanor Strubing told them she had been raped repeatedly by her African-American chauffeur, who dumped her off a bridge into the frigid waters.

Within hours, 31-year-old Joseph Spell was in police custody, accused of attacking his employer. And so began a sensational Bridgeport trial that made national headlines.



Attorney Michael Koskoff
Photo Credit: *Contributed photo*

It also caught the eye of attorney Michael Koskoff of Westport, who has spent the last seven years writing a screenplay about the case and its lead defense attorney, Thurgood Marshall, who went on to become the first African-American U.S. Supreme Court justice.

“Marshall” began filming last year and will continue this spring. It’s a labor of love that Koskoff believes will shine new light on Marshall’s early career as a defense attorney.

“I think it will be a revelation to people,” said the Westport resident. “The Marshall they’ll see in this movie is not the one they see in their mind’s eye.”

Koskoff, a partner at Bridgeport-based Koskoff, Koskoff & Bieder, was drawn to the story, in part because of his own experience with Civil Rights law, including the historic Black Panther trials in New Haven. A trial attorney for 50 years, he was struck by the way Marshall and fellow defense attorney Samuel Friedman, who was a Jew, worked together on the case.

“I was completely taken by the story,” he said. “I felt at home in it.”

Since the odds of getting a film produced are “astronomically against you,” Koskoff turned to his son, screenwriter Jacob Koskoff, for help with character development.

“Throughout this process we collaborated in a way we hadn’t since he coached my Little League teams when I was a kid. It was a true delight,” said Jacob Koskoff, a Westport native who lives in California and wrote the screenplay for the 2015 film “Macbeth.”

“I’ve always known how intelligent and creative he is, what a remarkable and successful attorney. What I didn’t fully appreciate until now is his relentless optimism, that he really lacks a single cynical bone in his body.”

Michael Koskoff is likely to be on set from time to time, as the filmmakers may need rewrites. He looks forward to watching Chadwick Boseman — who played Jackie Robinson in “42” and James Brown in “Get On Up” — take on the lead role.

Reginald Hudlin, who produced “Django Unchained,” is directing.

“I think a lot of the issues still resonate today,” Koskoff said.