

"He said, 'I'd like to bring you,'" Mr. Dershowitz said.

By any measure, Mr. Dershowitz had led an interesting life. At 28, after clerking for a Supreme Court justice, Mr. Dershowitz became the youngest professor ever hired by Harvard Law School. It was outside the classroom, however, where his fame grew. He handled celebrated cases, appeared as television commentator and wrote many books, fiction and nonfiction. His account of the von Bulow case, "Reversal of Fortune," was made into a film in 1990 in which the actor Ron Silver donned a bushy mustache and aviator glasses to play Mr. Dershowitz.

Along with enjoying celebrity, Mr. Dershowitz has also relished excoriating those he considers foes. He has taken on journalists, chided universities for coddling students and has been relentless in his defense of Israel, for example, accusing the writer Alice Walker of bigotry for refusing to allow an Israeli publisher to translate her novel "The Color Purple."

Soon after meeting Mr. Epstein, Mr. Dershowitz became drawn into his rarefied world. Mr. Epstein was an enigmatic figure living in an Upper East Side mansion once owned by Mr. Wexner, who had reportedly been his mentor. A college dropout who once worked for Bear Stearns, Mr. Epstein said he handled investments for billionaires, though other than Mr. Wexner, he declined to identify them.

Along with prominent businessmen, Mr. Epstein's friends included scientists, socialites and celebrities. He donated \$30 million to finance scientific research at Harvard. President Bill Clinton and the actor Kevin Spacey flew aboard his private jet to Africa to discuss AIDS policy.

Mr. Dershowitz also traveled on Mr. Epstein's plane and was invited to join his chats with Ehud Barak, the former Israeli prime minister. The men grew so close that Mr. Dershowitz solicited Mr. Epstein's feedback as he was writing books.

In the interview in his Manhattan apartment, Mr. Dershowitz said Mr. Epstein was often surrounded by young women, but none struck him as underage. "I never got involved in his social life," he said.

However, in late 2005, around the time when Mr. Dershowitz and his family were vacationing at Mr. Epstein's home, Palm Beach detectives were sifting through the trash outside. Acting on a tip, the authorities were investigating whether women working as assistants to Mr. Epstein were finding teenage girls to give him sexual massages. As the inquiry unfolded, detectives spoke with girls, some of whom were 15 or younger.

After taking the case, Mr. Dershowitz responded, as was his way, with hardball tactics. He gathered information from the girls' postings on social media accounts, which he claimed showed they were drug users or had lied to Mr. Epstein about their age. He also helped put together a defense team that included Roy Black, the prominent trial lawyer, and Kenneth W. Starr, who led the investigation into President Bill Clinton's involvement with Monica Lewinsky.

A local prosecutor, after meetings with Mr. Epstein's defense team, recommended that he be charged only with a misdemeanor. The chief of the Palm Beach police department was so outraged by the proposal that he wrote a letter to the Justice Department asking it to get involved in the case.

Over time, authorities found evidence suggesting that Mr. Epstein had paid dozens of girls for sexual services. However, Mr. Dershowitz and other lawyers struck a deal in which Mr. Epstein agreed to plead guilty in a Florida court to one count of soliciting prostitution and another of procuring a person under 18 for prostitution. At the same time, federal officials agreed not to bring charges against Mr. Epstein or any of his potential co-conspirators.

A Florida judge sentenced Mr. Epstein to 18 months in jail, though he was allowed to spend days working on the outside. He was released in 2009 after serving 13 months -- a shortened sentence for good behavior -- and had to register as a sex offender.

For a criminal lawyer, the residue of a case can remain long after it ends.

Twenty years ago, Mr. Dershowitz received death threats after he helped secure Mr. Simpson's acquittal on murder charges. And as a writer, he has imagined even worse plots. In one of his legal thrillers, "The Advocate's Devil," a lawyer discovers that a man for whom he had won an acquittal on rape charges is stalking his daughter.

But Mr. Epstein's case has come back to haunt him in ways he never expected. "I have been criticized for the cases I've taken," he said, "but no one has ever criticized my personal life."

The events that pulled him back into Mr. Epstein's orbit began unfolding in 2008. That year, two lawyers, Bradley J. Edwards and Paul G. Cassell, filed a lawsuit accusing the Justice Department of violating the rights of two women involved in Mr. Epstein's case by not allowing them to challenge his plea deal.

Then, in 2011, a British newspaper, The Mail on Sunday, published an article about [REDACTED] another of Mr. Epstein's accusers, who was then living in Australia. His sister, now a 52-year-old mother of three, told the newspaper that Mr. Epstein first started paying her for sexual services when she was 15. She also described traveling around the world on Mr. Epstein's jet.

"Basically, I was training to be a prostitute for him and his friends who shared his interest in young girls," [REDACTED] told the newspaper.