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Alison G. Myhra

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A TRIBUTE TO OUR TEACHER

ALISON G. MYHRA*

A little over a year ago, my work happily took me to Grand Forks to do some research at the University of North Dakota libraries. In advance of my arrival, and unknown to me, Randy Lee generously made all the necessary arrangements, notifying librarians of my visit, introducing them to my project, and securing for me the cards essential for all research projects, a copy machine card and a (faculty) library card. He even obtained a list of the law library's holdings on my topic of inquiry, thereby jump-starting my research efforts. He also arranged for me to meet with various faculty members who could provide helpful guidance. During my stay, he made himself available during the school day, and so I enjoyed rather frequent conversations with him and benefited from his sage counsel and candid comments on my work and, not surprisingly, on an array of unrelated but "important" matters. And, of course, he organized several dinners at thoughtfully selected restaurants, including a brand-new Italian restaurant on South Washington, the opening of which he eagerly had anticipated.

Randy's office at the law school was just as I remembered it during law school roughly twenty years ago. Abundant numbers of books and ample piles of papers on all flat surfaces were still present, although I was certain that over the years he had substituted newer papers for older papers. Randy's "stuff," as I believe he referred to it, continued to make his office, in my opinion, a busy but warm place, one reflecting his energy and commitment to legal education and the practice of law, as well as his interest in a set of wide-ranging issues and his involvement in local, state, and national projects. I was delighted to discover that it seemed to have persisted as one of the law school's "safe harbors," one of several that I first identified when I was a student present in his office to ask him questions about agency and partnership, corporations, conflict of laws, or professional responsibility. I smiled when I saw that he had decorated one wall with pictures of polar bears in various poses.

My six-day visit was both productive and fun, in large part because Randy was such a gracious host. At dinner the night before I left town, I

*Professor of Law, Texas Tech University School of Law. LL.M., Harvard University, 1991; J.D. with distinction, University of North Dakota School of Law, 1985. B.S.Ed., B.A., University of North Dakota, 1982.

attempted to convince Randy to postpone retirement, which he had hinted at in an earlier conversation, for the simple reason that he was too young. Not that it was any of my business, but I suggested to him that he ought to work for at least a few more years. I argued that the students needed him, that the university needed him, and that the bar needed him. He was undeterred, of course, and informed me that he and Paula already had outlined post-retirement plans, and that he was set to retire in roughly fourteen months, four days, twelve hours, and five minutes.

Randy's death a mere five months after my visit, when he was so very alive, therefore, seems not only improbable but impossible as well. His death was shockingly untimely, too early, reminding us that life is fragile and that one of life's crushing blows is losing someone before his time. Like everyone who knew and adored him, I am profoundly sad. Although a tribute would not be Randy's style, for he was indifferent to attention and the limelight, the fact is that he was one of my heroes, one of my favorite people to admire, as he was for so many. Thus, there is much to say so that we can celebrate his life, thank him for the many ways in which he touched our lives, and honor his legacy in our collective memory.

Randy should be remembered as the uniquely kind, generous, and talented man that he was. He loved life. And he loved people. He was very fond of big band music, good restaurants, good conversation, baseball, armadillos, and polar bears. One of his favorite activities was his Sunday morning radio show; one of his prized possessions was his Mickey Mantle baseball.

Randy also loved the law. He was a great and good man who played a singular role in legal education at the University of North Dakota School of Law. Not only did he teach us the law and how to think about the law, he shared his wisdom and taught us how to reach our potentials. He was intellectually rigorous, but at the same time he humanized the teaching and learning project, and he did so long before it was in vogue even to think to do so. He was an authentic Renaissance man, self-actualizing in every way, whose depth and breadth of knowledge and experience were staggering.

It was an honor to be Randy Lee's student, and he will remain forever one of my favorite people. Although I will never have another chance to thank him, his life will always serve as a benchmark.