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Tributes

TRIBUTES TO DEAN JAMES FORSYTH

MY MENTOR, MY FRIEND

LYNNE A. BATTAGLIA*

In the spring of 1971, I was seriously conflicted about whether to go to law school or complete graduate work, so I ventured to Baltimore for the first time to meet with the Registrar, James Forsyth. That meeting helped me make up my mind to become a lawyer—a decision that I have celebrated during the richness of my career. Thus, Jim Forsyth, in his role then and now as my “wise advisor,” is responsible for whatever I have done or will do.

Jim’s obvious gifts manifest in his wise advice. He has been to me not only a coach, but a technical mentor, consultant, and counsel.

His coaching, of course, led me to become a law student. His words of encouragement are vivid to me. In 1971, there were few women in law school—as we have discovered in the Finding Justice project—and the Women’s Movement had just begun, so mentors were few and far between. Jim’s support made all the difference—he really did not see any gender disparity.

With respect to his technical advice, during all of the years I have been an adjunct professor, teaching various courses at the University of Maryland School of Law, Jim has been stalwart in providing information on all aspects of teaching, even the mundane. How could I tape a student performance? What should I do when a member of the cleaning staff came into my class, while it was being held at a tempo-

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* Lynne A. Battaglia, Judge, Court of Appeals of Maryland, 3d Appellate Circuit.

rary building, and insisted on washing the carpet? (He did not, by the way.) How would I deal with room changes when there were not enough chairs?

Jim also served as a consultant to me in my career and in all of my teaching endeavors. I would send multiple e-mails to him during the course of a semester when I would need sagacity in the handling of a problem. One especially thorny one was how to encourage a colleague to leave a classroom at the end of her class so that I could begin to teach at a reasonable hour!

And finally, and probably most importantly, Jim Forsyth has been my counselor when serious issues have arisen regarding students, such as when a troubled classmate was not attending or when a student needed not only financial help, but also personal resources. He let me vent when a difficult student or issue challenged my grace under fire. I could always count on Jim's advice to pull me through.

In all, Jim Forsyth has been my wise advisor, and I will miss having direct access to his counsel as I navigate through the shoals of my own professional life.

JIM FORSYTH: MASTER OF RULES—AND JUSTICE

WILLIAM REYNOLDS*

The University of Maryland School of Law is a very nice place to work and study, as it has been for many years. Not only is it efficient, but the School is quite successful at creating real value for its constituents. Even better, most everyone, students, staff, and faculty alike, seems to be happy. There are many reasons for that success: Among them, able deans, governance by faculty committees (rather than by the Faculty Council), and excellent administrative staff at all levels.

Jim Forsyth personified that last category. During his four decades in the Dean's Office, Jim occupied many positions. I first knew him in his role as Dean of Admissions (before there even was such a title), a job he held for many years. Jim's organizational skills, good cheer, and earnest desire to help students made him a much-loved head of a very trying process. Several times, I encountered students at other schools, students to whom we had denied admission, who still had nice things to say about Jim and our admissions process.

The Dean's Office was much smaller in the early days, and Jim necessarily wore many hats. As I recall, he was in charge of exam administration. That was a very good thing because exams can be a very trying time for students and faculty alike. It was a good thing that Jim was running things. No matter how horrible a disaster loomed from some typo or traffic jam or imponderable act of the gods, Jim knew how to handle the problem; he made sound decisions and he stilled the storm.

One of Jim's greatest strength is that he has always been unflappable. Especially strong in my memory is how his calm in the occasional contentious faculty meeting could keep matters from disintegrating until eventually order would be restored. Under Jim, the center always held.

Probably the most important thing that Jim did, however, was helping our students. Students go to the Registrar, Jim's last formal position, with many problems, ranging from the trivial to the terrible. Jim and his able staff—Janice, Joyce, Lois, and Robin (all of whom also have serious seniority)—were there to help. They *always* put the students' welfare first. If Jim could help them, he would, and he often went to great lengths to do so. Jim was able to provide help that was sometimes unexpected because of his complete and unique mastery of the School's regulations. These rules were effectively unknown to others because they were not codified and often could only be dimly remembered. Only someone with Jim's seniority and attention to detail (along with Alice Brumbaugh) had the requisite mastery of the arcana to rummage through faculty actions spanning decades, actions not even dimly recalled by the old-timers, to find what was needed to help the student.

Jim's efforts (as well as those of Alice) on behalf of others were not limited to bureaucratic mastery. There also would be phone calls, patient counseling, and other above-and-beyond actions—whatever was needed to do the trick.

I will close with an anecdote. I first met Jim Forsyth in August of 1971, and we have been friends ever since. Over thirty-eight years, we have shared much, including our love of travel and our disdain for authority. What I remember best is something he said at the very beginning of our friendship. A few days after I had begun life as a brand new, very young professor, I asked Jim—the only figure of authority still around in the Dean's office in August—if it was okay if I went away for a few days. He looked at me as if I were an alien and said simply, "You're a law professor, you can do anything you want." That

was the first life lesson Jim taught me. Law professors have no bosses. What a great job!

Jim, the law school has been a much better place because of you. The School and I shall—and do—miss you.

DEAN JIM FORSYTH

DAVID S. BOGEN*

Jim Forsyth and I arrived at the University of Maryland School of Law the same year. We both looked younger than most of the students, but I subsequently aged. Jim did not. Oh, a few flecks of grey peeped out from his short blond hair, and he still wears the granny glasses that he affected several decades ago in a vain attempt to avoid the “boy dean” tag that students gave him,¹ but basically he has remained a perpetual fountain of youth for four decades.

When we came to the law school, the faculty and staff dominated the softball team with only a sprinkling of students. Jim was steady but not spectacular at bat—singles and doubles with an occasional triple, but no home runs. He was, however, a magnificent centerfielder with astounding range, able to catch everything he reached and to throw accurately to the proper base without a mistake. When Mike Kelly became dean, Jim Forsyth left the law school to run the financial aid office for the campus and he never played softball for the law school again. Jim nevertheless continued to cover a lot of territory to field all sorts of problems with sure hands.

After trying to run the School without Jim, Dean Kelly soon realized how essential he was and Jim recognized how much he loved the law school. He returned as assistant dean to run the admissions office. As dean of admissions, Jim and John Ester traveled the country for years, recruiting new students and talking about the remarkable growth of the School. Sometime in the mid-seventies the School adopted an anonymous grading system—which expanded Jim’s workload in supervising the administration of exams and demanded the greatest precision. Maintaining confidentiality also meant that student problems and requests for delayed administration came to Jim. With time and experience he became a master at working with stu-

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1. Actually, the close reading of all those schedules and student records required the glasses.

dents, enforcing the rules with empathy and grace. As he took on registration and student records duties, he and his staff monitored each student's progress (and payments) and he guided students through the maze.

In effect, Dean Forsyth oversaw the entire law school experience for thousands of students, from the process of their admission through registration each semester, compliance with the faculty's requirements, and taking exams until graduation. At graduation, he announced each student's name as they went on stage to get their Maryland hood at the law school ceremony and then he went to the Convention Center where he was master of ceremonies for the campus graduation. His voice was wonderful and his aplomb amazing. When one year I took his place at the hooding ceremony so he could attend the college graduation of one of his children, I discovered how excruciatingly difficult it is to get everyone's name right and to live with yourself when you get it wrong in front of the graduate and their family. I am not sure how anyone can graduate in the future without Jim to announce their name or give them marching orders.

Students and faculty alike appreciate his smooth and efficient operation of every job given him—over the past decade he has concentrated on registration and enrollment tasks and supervising the examination process. At least from the outside, it is extraordinarily glitch free and the envy of most schools. Of course, Jim quickly explains that it runs so well because his assistants do the work. Janice, Joyce, Lois, and Robin kept the School and Jim in order. When Admissions was separated from Registration and Enrollment, he relied on Janice and Robin to keep him going. But while Jim gives them credit for the office, it was their loyalty and support that made him the envy of the rest of the administration.

When he retired, Jim was the only dean without a law degree—but the breadth of his experience gave him unmatched insight into the operations of the School. Anyone can see how well he ran his office, but only those who have been in the dean's meetings can fully appreciate his role at the core of the School. He always understood what students needed, when to be firm, and when to steer around the rules. He had sympathy for every student and could point out to other deans a better road to accomplish their goals. He rarely pushed himself or his views on anyone, but if you came to him for advice on any matter—personal or professional—he would listen sympathetically and suggest a wise course. He balanced rules and flexibility with integrity in an extraordinary way. While he enjoys his retirement, here at Maryland he will be missed.

JAMES F. FORSYTH: A TRIBUTE

ALAN D. HORNSTEIN*

In the four decades since Jim Forsyth came to the University of Maryland School of Law, legal education has undergone important changes. From a largely Socratic and lecture-based enterprise carried on in large classes to the introduction of seminars, workshops, externships, clinical experiences, and enhanced instruction in research and writing, legal education has become more individualized and more connected to professional practice. All of this has been remarked in the literature regarding legal education.

Less remarked upon, but more relevant to Dean Forsyth's experience, is the revolution in the administration of law schools over the same period. When Jim began at the School of Law, the administration comprised the Dean, an Associate Dean, a part-time director of "placement and alumni relations," and Jim. There was no Dean of Students. There was no full-time Career Development professional, much less a department devoted to that important enterprise. There was no Director of Admissions. There was no development office. It is fair to say that most law schools—and certainly this law school—ran an administratively lean shop.

As a consequence, Jim wore many hats. For a long time, he ran the admissions process. He served as the School's registrar. He performed most of the services one would expect of a dean of students. He scheduled and administered examinations. He helped to develop the academic calendar each year. He assured that each potential graduate had satisfied all the requirements for the Juris Doctor degree. He was counselor and advisor to scores of students (and not a few faculty).

When a faculty member retires, there is often a public recognition of the retiree's contributions to the institution. It is after all, the Dean and faculty that are the public face of the School. But no single faculty member, no matter how beloved or respected, not even the legends, so-called, could have had a more pervasive impact on the functioning of the law school than Jim has had. And none is likely to have had more contact with any student.

For many years, a student's first contact with the School of Law would be through Jim, wearing his Admissions hat. The last contact one would have as a student was to hear his or her name being an-

nounced at the commencement ceremony—without mispronunciation or hesitation—by what sounded like God on the radio, but was in actuality Jim. Between those events, Jim managed virtually all aspects of students' careers at the law school, from the day-to-day standard administrative matters to the more unusual or even emergency situations—the student whose parent passed away the day before her exam, or who was involved in an automobile accident and needed to take some time off, or who needed to drop a course after the regular add/drop period. It was most often Jim who acted as the go-between between the student and faculty member or faculty committee or administration.

Jim would have made a wonderful common law judge. He had a deep respect for academic and administrative rules. But he also knew when to search for the purpose behind a rule, and if that purpose would not be furthered by a strict application in an unanticipated situation, he was likely to find a way around. Even more important, however, Jim had the soul of the Chancellor in Equity. Fed by a deep compassion, he would fight for an exception to the rule in those circumstances where that was warranted. It was this combination of respect for the rule and flexibility, of rigor and compassion, that made Jim such an extraordinary administrator.

The word “administrator” has its roots in the notion of ministry. Jim ministered to the students in his charge and the institution of which he was so integral a part, all without fanfare or much recognition for some forty years. It is difficult to imagine the law school without him.

But beyond all this, for me, what is most important is that he is my friend, possessed of all those many qualities that make me proud of his friendship.