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Touched by Greatness

Shruti Rana

University of Maryland Francis King Carey School of Law, shrutirana@yahoo.com

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TOUCHED BY GREATNESS**Shruti Rana***

Like many others, I have always viewed Judge Browning as a giant in his field, someone who has touched everyone he has encountered in personally meaningful ways. The lessons I have learned from him are innumerable and invaluable, and are lessons I hope to follow and convey throughout my career and personal life.

Above all, Judge Browning taught me the meaning of true humility, that greatness comes from one's accomplishments and integrity, not the trappings of fame or fortune. As an impressionable young law clerk, I had the opportunity to observe how Judge Browning treated each person he encountered with grace and respect, never flaunting his position but rather treating it as one of honor and privilege. Through his work and vision, I believe he exemplifies the American ideal that while judges hold great power and prestige, they are not separate from or above the rest of society, but rather are integral threads in the fabric of American society.

I was able to see first-hand how Judge Browning treated each case and each party before him with equal respect and importance. He imparted to us the view that no matter what the issue before the court, each case involved high personal stakes for the individuals or parties involved. He brought to life the issues we had studied in law school, inspiring us to view cases as not just exercises in legal reasoning but as cases with significant impact on individuals, legal policy, and even national policy. Through Judge Browning's efforts, we learned to see our positions as law clerks as a position of privilege, where we had a unique chance to learn about some of the most pressing issues of the time. Judge Browning also carried these markers of respect into his interaction with his peers—he always strove to maintain the collegiality and respectful dialogue that marked his tenure on the Ninth Circuit, despite the controversial issues that often came before the court.

His integrity, genuine care for each individual case, and his intellectual prowess helped me learn many personal lessons as well which I view as my duty to carry on to my students and colleagues, past and future.

For example, when I arrived at the Ninth Circuit chambers on my first day as a law clerk, I was awed by the beautiful and grand courthouse which now bears Judge Browning's name and by the renowned judges who wel-

* Shruti Rana, J.D. Columbia Law School. Associate Professor of Law, University of Maryland Francis King Carey School of Law. Clerked for Judge Browning: 2002–2003.

comed us, and I was excited to immerse myself in the significance and weightiness of the new roles we were to undertake. For me, this was a heady experience, and the first time I touched the upper echelons of American power. I grew up in the United States as the child of immigrants, who knew little about the world they were entering but had the bravery to traverse continents based on bits of hope that life could be better and that they could handle whatever came before them. Growing up, their bravery was intimidating, as I always thought there was nothing I could achieve that could match such a breathtaking and risky journey into the unknown.

However, for the first time, when I entered Judge Browning's chambers, I felt that although I had not literally entered a new world as my parents had, I was in some way fulfilling the journey they had begun. As my parents struggled through the many challenges facing immigrants, I was suddenly catapulted into one of the most honored arms of the government, given unparalleled opportunities to learn from judges who had earned their wisdom and respect, exemplified integrity, and had the grace to share their knowledge with often rather "green" clerks. For this opportunity, I will be forever grateful, and this experience has instilled in me the desire to follow their examples and view the law as not merely a tool for justice or addressing disputes, but also as a means of shaping society by pursuing ideals of justice while facing the dilemmas of our times.

On a more personal note, I will always remember Judge Browning confronting some of the most heart-wrenching cases before him, approaching them with care and concern and always upholding his fidelity to the law. He assuaged our feelings of momentary heartbreak when cases we were particularly moved by were lost, by telling us that he had faith in the law, and that justice would always ultimately prevail, whether one case was lost or overruled. He further echoed these lessons in his personal life, treating us with the utmost respect and listening to our opinions with the same respect he accorded the parties before him.

On a lighter note, he also gracefully tempered our occasional hot-headedness and idealism about issues we deeply cared about, and taught us how to channel that passion into doing the best work we could within the boundaries of the law. These lessons have stayed with me throughout my career, and in each position I have had, whether at laws firms, policy positions, or in teaching, I have sought to infuse my work with the grace, insight, and thoughtfulness he exemplified for us. Indeed, every time I meet the Judge I am reminded of how far I have to go to even come close to the standards he embodied and set for us.

For these reasons, I truly believe that Judge Browning has imbued his life's work with a rare sense of greatness, impacting both the most impor-

tant problems of the day but also profoundly impacting people from all walks of life that he came across inside and outside the courtroom.

I would like to end with a brief anecdote that I think reflects both his attitude towards life and the respect he engendered from nearly everyone he met. During my clerkship experience, the Judge would often walk unaccompanied through some of the most transitional areas of town near the courthouse. Yet every time he walked these paths, the people surrounding him, whether lawyers, litigants, or people living on the margins of society, each person would always clear a path for the judge, and accord him the utmost respect as he passed through these neighborhoods. I believe that very few people achieve this level of nearly universal respect and love in their careers, especially those dealing with controversial and divisive issues. I believe that Judge Browning is one of few people who has done so, and that in addition to his prodigious legal accomplishments, his power to touch ordinary people will be one of his greatest legacies to the Ninth Circuit and our country. For these reasons, I truly feel the experience of clerking for Judge Browning was an experience of being touched by true greatness.