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A Tribute: To Larry Kalevitch

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A TRIBUTE: TO LARRY KALEVITCH

STEVEN FRIEDLAND*

Ralph Fiennes, the actor, once was asked if he considered himself a success. His response was revealing:

Well, I don't know quite what you mean by success. Material success? Worldly success? . . . I call people "successful" not because they have money or their business is doing well but because, as human beings, they have a fully developed sense of being alive and engaged in a lifetime task of collaboration with other human beings, their mothers and fathers, their family, their friends . . . [Success] is all about being able to extend love to people [n]ot in a big, capital-letter sense but in the everyday. Little by little, task by task, gesture by gesture, word by word.¹

By Ralph Feinnes' definition, as well as my own, Larry Kalevitch was a resounding success. His success was found not simply in the way he taught his courses with passion, vigor, and enthusiasm. It was not just the breadth of his knowledge about contracts or bankruptcy or the way he would launch himself into arguments enervating opposing contentions. Rather, Larry's success could be found in his relationship with his son, Ben, his dedication to his students, his playful interaction with colleagues at meetings, his competitive fire with friends on a tennis court, and his New England charm as a host in his own living room. Larry's success emerged from his willingness to respond to those in need of consultation, advice, a meal, friendship, or simply a pat on the back. It arose from the way he was happy to listen without judgment, offering his loyal support for others through their bad times and good times.

The famous Torts professor, William Prosser, once wrote: "At last, mustering his courage, the young man comes to the great question: How do you teach law? And the old professor, who is at least a very truthful man, answers him as he was himself answered so many years before: "I don't know. None of us knows."²

As a law professor, Larry knew many things. He knew the subject matter of his courses inside and out. He knew how to challenge students to think

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1. Dotson Radar, *Success? What About Happiness?*, PARADE, March 9, 1997, available at <http://www.geocities.com/szerelem96/print/parade0309.htm>.

2. W. Prosser, "Lighthouse No Good," 1 J. Legal Educ. 257 (1948).

on a higher plane, how to push the envelope of their analytical skills and how to engage the students in far-reaching policy discussions. He knew how to generate dialogues about specific legal rules and principles. He knew how to engage others in intellectual give-and-take, often with humor and benevolence.

Arthur C. Clarke, the writer, once said, "I don't pretend we have all the answers. But the questions are certainly worth thinking about." Larry would have agreed wholeheartedly. His students regularly attempted to rise to the occasion, and I heard some students recall fondly the exact time they thought they rode the bull of analysis without falling off, earning Larry's respect. To Larry, a class was like an orchestral concert, requiring everyone to be in sync for the sound to flow properly. The satisfaction he reaped from a class that clicked was visceral, on the same level as that experienced by his students. It was what kept him always coming back for more.

What is telling about Larry's love for teaching is the way he pursued it with vigor, even after his illness had taken its toll. Larry set up chairs in his living room and held class there; the professor-protagonist of the book, *Tuesdays With Morrie*, could not have been any more of an inspiration.

When I first met Larry Kalevitch, it was in the quirky building at South West Ninth Avenue in east Fort Lauderdale that served at the time as the law school for Nova University. Appearances could be deceiving, however, both for the building and for Larry. While the building had elevators that lurched to a start, pillars that ran through some of the classrooms and places for students to sit in the 90 degree heat, inaccurately called "the breezeway," it was a homey environment and a good place to work. As for Larry, I immediately took in his Boston Brahmin tweed coat, his khaki pants and loafers, and his ever-present mustache, and proceeded to judge him as a restrained northerner. That was the last time I ever thought of Larry as restrained.

But his physical appearance was not what struck me; rather it was the twinkle in his eyes. I had no idea I would soon be hitting tennis balls with him at Hardy Park, adjacent to the equally-serious lawn bowlers; and that he would become a mentor, providing me with valuable counsel over the years.

One story in particular provides insight into Larry's generosity. On a Saturday afternoon, while playing tennis with Larry in the hot summer sun, I went back for a lob and felt my back "pull apart." I immediately fell to the ground and groaned, feeling as if the wrenched back would not allow me to move for days. Larry helped me up and carefully folded me into his car. We drove to his house, where I proceeded to immediately lie down on his living room floor, my feet raised on a foot stool and my eyes fixed on the living room ceiling. I shared the floor with his large dog, Bear. Larry was the consummate host, periodically asking if I wanted anything to drink or eat and carrying on an engaging, albeit one-sided, conversation. I found myself ly-

ing on the floor for an hour, then through the afternoon and into the night. After dusk, Larry kept me company by watching television, acting as if friends usually spent the evening lying flat on their backs on his living room floor. Without mentioning that he had anything else to do, Larry calmly inquired about what I wanted for dinner and then said something to the effect, "You might as well stay put for the night." So that's what I did, lying on Larry Kalevitch's living room floor with my feet propped up on a foot stool and my back well-supported. When Larry greeted me the next morning with his booming voice, "So, feeling better, Frieds?," I knew he was a special friend indeed.

Larry took Johann Von Goethe's approbation to heart, "Willing is not enough; we must do," and he became an enthusiastic participant in several communities, rather than merely an observer. In addition to offering an active and respected voice in the law school community, he participated in his religious community and served several terms on the board of directors of his neighborhood association. Larry would approach a neighborhood conflict, such as whether a mailbox in front of one of the homes conformed to neighborhood requirements, with the same passion and meticulous analysis as he would a burning legal issue in class. "Frieds," he would say, "Listen to this one."

If the truest measure of a person is the friends he keeps, Larry was a rich man. He generated fierce loyalty among those around him. The dedication of people such as Johnny, Lynn, and Phyllis is a testament to Larry as well as to themselves.

I have learned over the years that relationships with people do not end simply because they move away or pass on. I still hear Larry's cackle and feel his wisdom. Larry did more than help shape a fledgling law school at Nova University, he helped shape many, many people within it, including me.