Laurance Hyde, 1975-78

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Abstract

I came to Fort Lauderdale in February 1976 to interview for a faculty position at the new Nova University “Center for the Study of Law.”
The meeting was better than the waiting. The initial class was a wonderful mix of people who were willing to take the risk of a new, untested law school. Many of those students came to Nova because they had families in the South Florida area and could not go away to law school. Others had no choice—the new Nova was their only entre to becoming a lawyer. At that meeting Peter provided wisdom, humor, stability and, when introducing the faculty, made it seem like the students were lucky to be in on the ground floor of this new law school.

Peter Thornton was right. That first class had a special nature, and formed a special bond with themselves and the faculty, and, later, with the communities in which they went to practice. Their successes are a tribute to Peter Thornton’s willingness to leave the safety of South Bend and create a new institution in a less than optimum physical, economic and educational environment. He put together the few resources he could find and actually made a law school. Today, almost 20 years later, we are ready to embark on the rest of our lives. We are well housed, in a new building. We are well educated, with ABA and AALS accreditation. We are respected for what we have accomplished in our first two decades. We were lucky to have Peter Thornton as our Founding Father—the man who set us on the way.

Last year Peter Thornton came back for a class reunion at my house. His white hair was as thick and beautiful as alway; his blue eyes as clear as that luncheon day in 1974; and the twinkle even stronger, for he was surrounded by many of those in the charter class: men and women whose lives were changed because Peter Thornton made a law school.

I came to Fort Lauderdale in February 1976 to interview for a faculty position at the new Nova University "Center for the Study of Law." It was housed in the bottom floor of the Parker Building. Germ-free rats lived on the top floor. The new law school’s dean was Laurance M. Hyde, Jr. Larry had been hired to be a professor, but was thrust into the deanship shortly after the law school opened. Nothing in the minutes of the faculty meetings (or anywhere else for that matter) explains how or why or when the mantle of leadership abruptly shifted to him from Dean Thornton, and no one was interested in revealing the details to the newcomers.

Larry had been a judge in Missouri—and he had both run and taught at the National Judicial College at the University of Nevada—but running a law school was an entirely different matter. For one thing, there was the American Bar Association to deal with. For another, the university was far from stable. In fact, one inspector had charitably described it as "a speculative venture." Thus Larry had to learn the law school business on the job, under fire, and in the midst of an academic earthquake.

Joining the faculty in the law school’s third year was an adventure. There were third year students for the first time and we had to prepare for the first graduation. There were only seventeen professors, but that was almost double the size of the previous year and created a lot of disruption in faculty dynamics.

In those early years, the dean was practically the whole administration. He operated with only his secretary, one administrative assistant, a director of admissions, and an admissions secretary. How they managed to get everything done in those pre-computer years is a wonder. In his spare time, Larry also taught Professional Responsibility and Criminal Law to the freshmen. He rode his bicycle to and from school every day, setting the relaxed social atmosphere.

Larry is a sailor at heart. After returning to the faculty in his post-dean years, he had a poster on his door which read, "I’d rather be sailing," and I am sure that was true. He was a first-rate navigator, capable of piloting a sailboat across the Atlantic, but he was never the tyrannical sea captain so popular in literature. He would try to get the faculty talking together so we
could work out a consensus. This was no easy feat. Larry chose to downplay or even disregard most interpersonal conflicts, and frequently the conflict just went away. Larry instituted an "attitude adjustment seminar," which turned out to be a cocktail hour or, on one occasion, a wine tasting. It set the tone that cooperation and respect were to be accorded colleagues, even colleagues with whom one disagreed strongly. The Nova faculty did not then, or ever, degenerate into the armed camps which are so common on law school faculties.

Larry was always a good sport. He never took any of the faculty politics personally. At least he never let on if he did. He was always kind, decent, and patient as dean and as colleague. Despite his inexperience with law schools, Larry somehow kept the ship afloat. He navigated us through the shoals of the early years and past the reefs of ABA inspections. With Larry at the helm, we survived.

Just in case we never mentioned it, thanks Larry.

Don Llewellyn and Bruce Rogow, 1978-79

Marc Rohr

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way.

Charles Dickens, A Tale of Two Cities

The 1978-79 academic year was all of those things at Nova Law Center. The University’s financial position was dire, and a substantial bequest upon which the Law Center was depending had become the subject of litigation. The faculty became convinced that too high a percentage of Law Center revenues was being siphoned off by the University, and relations with the central administration were strained nearly to the breaking point. Student morale plummeted, and wishful thinking of secession abounded. We were, in the meantime, still housed, as joint tenants with an odiferous science lab, in a temporary structure that we knew would never be acceptable to the American Bar Association; our building plans, so long in the making, were scuttled by our fiscal morass.

It was a marvelous time to be alive.

It was against (and largely because of) this background that Professors Don Llewellyn and Bruce Rogow rose to the positions of "Acting Co-Deans" in the fall of 1978, and our spirits ascended with them. A wonderful sense of unity of purpose pervaded that academic year, joined by an exhilarating feeling of democracy; our leaders, dedicated but untainted by personal ambition, were also our peers. Don was the administrator of in-house details; Bruce was our minister of external affairs. A more capable team would be hard to imagine.

It’s amazing how much was accomplished during that academic year. A "new" building was located, leased, and renovated; the Law Center’s relationship with the University was greatly improved; a new dean was hired for the ensuing academic year; and, last but by no means least, faith was