In Memory of Larry Kalevitch: An Appreciation

Michael L. Richmond∗

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AN APPRECIATION

MICHAEL L. RICHMOND

Dog hiding in bushes behind you.
He knows you’re here. Ring bell.
Act as if nothing is wrong.¹

When you visited Larry Kalevitch, he did not merely welcome you. From the minute you reached the front door, he wanted you to smile and feel at home. Hence the text of his doormat. The doormat also bore a cartoon of a spotted pooch crouching surreptitiously behind a bush barely large enough to conceal its body. You smiled even more if you knew his dogs: first Bear, a huge happy Golden Retriever; then Paris, an even bigger Bouvier de Flan-dres, who firmly believed himself to be a lap dog. Both of them loved having visitors, and considered it their duty to make you know how much they enjoyed the time you spent with them—just like Larry.

He loved the Red Sox and he loved his son Benjamin—not in that order, but pretty darn close. He wanted to see them both succeed. He never did get his wish with the Sox,² but he certainly did with Benjamin. Larry’s son inherited his father’s lively intellect, and continues on a highly successful path in the business world. Larry also loved beauty in all of its forms. His tastes in music ranged from Bob Dylan to Giuseppe Verdi, and music played almost constantly in his home—at least, when sports were not on the television. He wired the entire house for sound, so that music from his stereo would permeate every corner. He had equally eclectic taste in art and reading material. Larry enjoyed good thrillers and science fiction every bit as

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¹ Text of doormat in front of Larry Kalevitch’s home. Source unknown. (Sorry, Law Review people, but it’s the best cite I can give you).

² As I write this, the 2003 baseball season nears its end. The Red Sox trail the Yankees by 5 1/2 games in the American League East, but are 2 1/2 games ahead of Seattle for the wild card berth into the playoffs. SOUTH FLORIDA SUN-SENTINEL, Sep. 17, 2003, at 4C. (I feel compelled to give my source for this information, not so much in respect for Larry’s prodigious scholarly talents, but because if I don’t the Law Review people will make me go back and add it later). Maybe the Red Sox will succeed this season. Larry would have enjoyed that far more than all of the articles in this issue.
much as *The Death of Contract*. Still, his academic pursuits best displayed the breadth of his interests. He studied and wrote about the statutory-driven world of bankruptcy, but his articles also dealt with the jurisprudential underpinnings of contract law. Others in this tribute will write more extensively about his outstanding scholarship.

Larry took his scholarship and his teaching very seriously. His students emerged from his classroom “bloodied, but unbowed.” Unflinchingly demanding, Larry insisted on extracting the best from his students, but he did so while allowing them to retain their dignity. He had little patience for the unprepared student, but for those who gave an honest effort, Larry had all the time in the world. Even in the last months of his life, confined to a wheelchair by the disease which took away the use of one side of his body, Larry insisted on holding class at his home. The law school staff transported tables and chairs to Larry’s house, and there in his living room Larry would meet with (and draw remarkable strength from) his students. Although Larry told his friends that he had achieved his goals in life and could peacefully accept his demise, in mid-November of 2002 he sadly said, “I think I’ve taught my last class.” He loved the classroom, and hated the realization that he would no longer have the opportunity to teach students how to think.

While Larry treated his life as a teacher with consummate professionalism, he refused to take himself as seriously. Larry accompanied his seemingly earth-shaking pronouncements with a sly grin, a raised eyebrow, and a tongue that just barely sneaked out to lick his upper lip. His peccadilloes received the same treatment, as did his poking fun of you. Larry punctured pomposity, but did so in such good humor that you could not resent it.

I played racquetball with Larry, but never tennis. At least with racquet-ball I could score an occasional point. Larry sought out and competed fiercely with some of the best tennis players in town—and in South Florida that meant some of the best tennis players available, including one woman who had ranked first among all juniors in the United States. I did not stay off the tennis court because Larry refused to play someone whose skills fell far beneath his own—I think he would happily have “dumbed down” his game to help me learn to improve mine. Rather, I believe he knew I wanted to compete and suggested racquetball as a viable alternative.

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5. I withhold her name out of a keen instinct for self-preservation. Law Review editors, please trust me on this one.
Larry’s friendships rarely focused on him—for Larry, it “was about” you. From his home to his classroom, from athletics to his office, Larry cared about the other guy. Our faculty meetings will miss his gentle reminders that some issues just did not matter as much as we thought. Larry’s Rabbi said to me: “Every time I drive down Old Hiatus Road and pass his intersection, I look down to his house. It does not seem right that someone else is living there.” It does not seem right that our students no longer have his wisdom, and that we no longer have his guidance.