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PROFESSOR HENRY T. KING, JR., 1919–2009: HONORING HIS LEGACY

Christopher M. Rassi

I always looked to Henry as a mentor. I first met Henry when I was an undergraduate student here at Case Western Reserve. I was taking part in an international humanitarian law competition—the Jean-Pictet Competition—being held in Malta that year. You may be wondering, “What does an 18 year old know about international humanitarian law?” I’m sure Henry too asked himself the same question when he first met me! However, Henry guided me and explained in detail his fascinating life in international criminal law. He brought the law “out of the books.” At that time, he was entrenched in the discussions to create the International Criminal Court. I immediately realized how fortunate I was to have as my private tutor one of the first international criminal lawyers. When delegates from 131 nations met in Rome to establish the ICC in 1998, their original draft placed war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide under the court’s jurisdiction. The delegates did not include the crime of aggression in the court’s statute. Henry traveled to Rome and lobbied to reshape the draft. His life’s work was accomplished when a reference to the crime of war of aggression was included in the court’s statute, and when the statute was adopted. And there I was learning from a true legend.

Henry was so eager to hear about my experiences at the Pictet, and remained curious about my growing involvement with the organization over the years. In 2001, he was honored when I asked him to be the opening speaker at the Competition, which was being held in the United States for the first time. He was the perfect person to open the event, and address the hundred or so students from around the world. They were in Cleveland to discuss the laws of war. Henry showed them firsthand how moral authority and the rule of law can effect positive change. Despite his unparalleled achievements, Henry

loved being part of new adventures. For years, he kept talking about the mix of cultures that he witnessed at the Pictet. In particular, he could not believe that a Russian team was composed of both Japanese and American law students. “Isn’t that something? That’s WONDERFUL,” he would often say. He encouraged me in all of these endeavors, because he truly loved international law and relations.

Henry never lectured me; he served as a constant reference on the practice of law, which continued upon my return from Malta in 1998, throughout law school, in private practice, and during my time as an international criminal lawyer in The Hague and Tanzania. In fact, my relationship with Henry blossomed while I was in law school.

My most poignant memory of Henry is from during the summer following my graduation from Case Law School when we drove from Montreal to Cleveland, covering 600 miles and lasting about 10 hours. Over the years, I had worked with Henry on the Canada-U.S. Law Institute, and he asked me to accompany him to receive the Canadian Bar Association President’s Medal, to be awarded in Montreal by his good friend Simon Potter. We planned to meet at the hotel (most likely for a Manhattan prior to the reception—as a side note, which will probably come as a disappointment to some of you in the audience today, Henry once told me that I make the best Manhattan). The day was Saturday, August 16, 2003, and most of you from the Great Lakes Region will remember this day as the day that chaos hit Niagara—the blackout of August 14, 2003. Henry was unfortunately en route from Cleveland to Montreal (via Toronto) and due to the power outage, it became apparent to everyone right before the banquet that Henry was not going to make it to Montreal. It seemed like all flights from Toronto were cancelled. I didn’t know what to do—there I was in my tuxedo, Henry’s guest, with no reason to be at the event by myself, sitting at the head table with Canadian legal and political luminaries, including the Chief Justice of Canada. And I sat there, not knowing how to accept Henry’s award, and saddened that he could not be there to accept it. People were saying great things about Henry—it was sort of a polite roast, and I thought to myself, “Henry should really be here to witness this!”

After dinner and the first round of speeches, dessert was served. I glanced across the Oval Room at the Ritz Carlton and saw a figure moving between the tables, hugging and greeting guests along the way all the way up to the front of the room. I couldn’t believe it . . . Henry had made it for dessert. I do not know how he made it or how he had the energy to show up after spending so much time in the

Toronto airport, but he did, and he was ready to address the audience and receive his prize (but only after he had his dessert!). I leaned over and said—“How are you?” and he replied, “What did I miss?” I explained the wonderful speeches and great things that had been said about him and he replied, “No, I mean what did they serve for dinner?”

Understandably, Henry wanted no part of Air Canada for his return to Cleveland. He wanted to drive 10 hours with me instead. It became a truly special Sunday. We talked about life, his regrets, and his greatest accomplishments. He told me about his involvement with bar associations and other organizations that promoted legal cooperation and development, and his love of both international trade and humanitarian law. We talked about my career as a practicing lawyer, which was just beginning a few days later. We discussed what he saw me doing in the short- and long-term, and how I too could form a lasting impact on legal institutions and on both my countries: the USA that I now called home and Canada where I was born. That became the first of many conversations I had with Henry about my career and the role of lawyers. He was a trusted advisor to me—he wanted me to dedicate my career to the rule of law, and was so happy that I too had this “travel bug” and a desire to promote the work of international cooperation and institutions. Most importantly, his guidance was not unique to me; he was a role model for young lawyers and gave an extraordinary amount of time to helping the younger generations.

This past Easter, I spent an afternoon with Henry at his home in Pepper Pike having one of our regular discussions about life and work. I took the opportunity to ask everything that was on my mind. And his voice stays with me as I tackle tough questions, and know that Henry has given me a great foundation for the rest of my career. And because of Henry’s encouragement, guidance, and friendship, I will, as Henry always said, “look to the stars” and strive to be the lawyer that Henry always said he saw in me.

