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Dutch

Dana K. Cole

University of Akron School of Law, dkc@uakron.edu

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DUTCH

Dana Cole, TLC '95

February 23, 2001

3:20 a.m. It's after 3:00 a.m. according to the clock on the computer. I can't sleep. I came home last night to the sad news that my good friend died earlier this week. His name was Mike Geer, but not too many people knew that. He went by "Dutch". He was secretive about his given name. He was a biker who rode an old Harley—a '68 Electra Glide. He had that bike for a long time—since long before I met him fifteen years ago. Full beard, shoulder length hair and a bit overweight, he looked like a stereotypical biker right down to the tattoo on his forearm. He had a gruff voice, a deep, booming laugh and soft eyes. It's very odd to speak of him in the past tense.

Because of his wisdom, I often referred to him as my spiritual advisor. I was a trial lawyer for more than ten years – until 1997 when I took a full-time teaching job at a law school three hours away. When I had a jury trial coming up and felt that I had not grasped the essence of the case—if it seemed that the facts were too complicated and tedious to present to the jury effectively—I would call Dutch. I'd buy him a couple of beers and explain the case to him. Dutch would invariably restate the case in simple, direct terms—the heart of the case captured in a single sentence on a paper napkin. He was a great jury trial consultant because he understood people.

He was only forty-five. The doctors say he had a brain aneurysm. He never woke up from the surgery. The funeral is today at 10:00 a.m. I have to go say good-bye to my friend. I'll ride the Harley if the temperature is above freezing. Dutch would like that.

5:00 p.m. The funeral was very sad. Dutch's ashes were in an ornate box on a table surrounded by photographs – some of which I took. Images of youthful Dutch in black and white stared out at a grieving crowd—a misplaced smile amidst joyless friends. The service lasted about an hour. The priest did a fair job convincing those who wanted to be convinced that Dutch is with God. He then asked if anyone wanted



to say anything about Dutch. Men, women and children spoke one by one—each recounting stories of how Dutch made their lives better. The audience consisted primarily of bikers—leather clad and leather faced—with names like Cruiser, Gator and Screw—their cheeks streaked with tears that disappeared into long graying beards. Each short speech started with the same heartfelt phrase: "Dutch was my best friend."

He was a husband. Sharon, his sweet wife of twenty-seven years, tolerated his rough friends with an odd mixture of grace and concern. He was a father. Lee, his only child, turned twenty-four only two days before Dutch died. Dutch was a welder by trade. He made motorcycle parts for his friends and earrings for their wives. He played chess using a set he made from steel. He used a motorcycle helmet for a flowerpot. He had a hound dog named Rebel. He had dozens of black Harley tee shirts. One of them said, "Good guys wear black." Men thought he looked mean and women thought he was cute. They were both right. Children, including my own daughters, instantly saw through his coarse façade and approached him with an easy affection. He was a contradiction as we all are—or should be.

A procession of cars and motorcycles flowed from the funeral home to a biker bar three or four miles away. It was still morning—too early to serve lunch, but the whiskey and beer were flowing freely. The bikers had regained their composure—no more tears—just toast

after toast. A few attempted eloquence, but most kept it as simple as, "To Dutch". Each toast was followed by the sound of a dozen emptied shot glasses coming down hard on the old wooden bar.

I didn't stay too long or drink too much. I took a long, cold ride after I left. I found myself on roads familiar to Dutch—roads I had shared with him often, but not often enough. I didn't spend as much time with Dutch after I took the teaching job. My daily routine will not change. But the routine will feel different. Dutch was one of the few that claimed a permanent role in my life and in my heart. I have lived for many years with the knowledge that he's back there, ready if I want him or need him. The world will be a bit sadder—a little less safe.

Robert James Waller wrote:

[M]ost of what I know that is good and true and

lasting has come not from scholars but from minstrels and gypsies, from magicians and magic, from jugglers swallowing fire. It has come from small bands of travelers who followed the rivers and told me old stories and chanted old warnings of young women dancing through late afternoons and into the firelight, leaving only a footprint for the morning that follows.

I'm better for having known Dutch.

Epilogue: Dutch was born in 1955 on June 21st – the summer solstice – the longest day and the shortest night of the year – when, many believe, the Sun God is at his height. On June 21, 2001, the first summer solstice after Dutch's death, there was a total eclipse of the sun visible from within a narrow corridor in the southern hemisphere. Coincidence? I like to think not.

Importance of Diversity

By Diversity Committee, F Warriors

We all would be hard pressed to find anyone involved with TLC—alumni, staff and supporters—who would not advocate for diversity in our organization. The messages on the list serve, personal conversations and one-on-one E-mail exchanges support the idea of having people from all walks of life participate in the many programs TLC has to offer. Who could deny that the greater the diversity, the more meaningful, enriching and beneficial our own experiences become?

Yet, reality does not always match our expectations. Our commitment and our ideals are ever present, but much more has to be done to improve our numbers. This is a call to our entire alumni group.

When diversity is mentioned, it is often assumed that one means racial or ethnic diversity. Perhaps this is because with the absence of color, the issue becomes more pronounced. Much of the focus should be on increasing our minority membership. But diversity for our organization also includes age, gender, physical disabilities, and sexual orientation. We also want to increase the number of public defenders and legal services attorneys.

What can we, as alumni, do to create greater diversity? First, let us identify people that will add to diversity. Approach them about applying to TLC or the regional programs. Talk about how TLC has improved your practice and other parts of your life and explain how our programs would benefit them professionally and personally. Show them our website and introduce them to other graduates. Then tell them you want to nominate them and encourage them to apply. Support them during the application process and if they are accepted, encourage them to attend (and if they don't get in the first time, tell them not to be discouraged and to apply again). When you provide our Executive Director Joane Garcia-Colson your nominee's name(s) and address(es) [ljgcesq@aol.com], she will send them an application packet and program brochures. Applications for next year's class are already available, and the sooner they are submitted, the better.

The other thing you can do is to join the Diversity Committee. If you want additional information, please contact Connie McGhee [Bentley2711@aol.com] or Fredi Sison [Fsison@juno.com]. Tony Garcia and Gerald Salseda are also members of the committee. Your energy, input and Ideas are welcome and needed!