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Gregory J. Stenmoe

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FORTIETH ANNIVERSARY TRIBUTE

Law Review Tribute: Practically Perfect

Gregory J. Stenmoe[†]

Mike Steenson was the visionary who created an institution that served three very practical purposes: publish a journal that practitioners and judges would read and use, teach hard-working and ambitious law students how to research and write, and provide a credential that would help distinguish its members from others in the marketplace.

Forty years ago a kid from Iowa came to Minnesota with a crazy idea: establish a law review at an institution where the students have full-time jobs, families, and attend night classes. And get them to volunteer their time to publish one of the best law reviews in the country. There were critics and naysayers—lots of them. But undaunted, Mike moved forward and found an amazing collaborator in Marcy Wallace, our first editor in chief. Through sheer brute force and determination, Mike and Marcy built this journal from the dust of the earth. There was no roadmap; there was no blueprint; but there was no turning back. Like the institution that spawned it, the journal they built was practical and useful, not some esoteric, academic self-indulgence. It was perfect for the time, and time has shown that a “practical” law review was ahead of its time.

The early years were not easy. Getting part-time, night law students to spend hundreds of hours writing an unproven law journal was a tough sell. Student authors would not get their name on anything they wrote or edited. There were no computers or word processors. Spell check did not exist. There were only a couple of manual typewriters, and they had no correcting keys. We bought whiteout by the gallon. And there was no air conditioning.

Before the *Law Review*, William Mitchell had a solid reputation, but graduates had difficulty landing the big jobs. The *Law Review*

[†] Gregory J. Stenmoe is a partner with the law firm of Briggs and Morgan, PA and is the chair of the litigation department. He was editor in chief for Volume 7 of the *William Mitchell Law Review*, an editor for Volume 6, and a staff member for Volume 5.

changed that. It gave the school, editorial board, and staff credibility—credibility that had not existed before. And the fact that judges and practitioners frequently read, used, and cited the journal was a major factor. The *Law Review* lived up to its promise. It taught us how to research and write, and it gave us a credential that helped distinguish ourselves in the marketplace and get good jobs at the best firms, biggest businesses, and finest institutions. And it opened the doors for Mitchell grads to get judicial clerkships—something that rarely happened in those days. I was the beneficiary of that newfound opportunity when Dan O’Keefe—executive editor on Volume 4—blazed the trail to a Judge Devitt clerkship for me.

I had the privilege of being editor in chief of Volume 7, which included a centennial tribute to Justice William Mitchell, an introduction written personally by United States Supreme Court Chief Justice Warren Burger, and an afterword by Minnesota Supreme Court Chief Justice Robert Sheran. That volume also included a heated debate over whether Minnesota should have an intermediate court of appeals, an idea that seems so incredibly noncontroversial today. Issue 2 boasted a timeless classic by the man himself, Mike Steenson: *A Primer on Minnesota No-Fault Automobile Insurance*.¹ Unlike current volumes, efficiency was not yet baked into the DNA of the *Law Review*. I recall spending a good deal of my summer with my fellow editors getting Issue 3 ready for press. All of us had graduated and we were studying for the bar, but one last issue remained. We worked on the *Law Review* in the sweltering heat by day and went to bar review courses by night. By some miracle, we got it done.

When I became editor in chief, I was told there were four unbreakable rules: never change our unique embossed cover, never accept ads, never compromise quality, and never forget that everyone on the *Law Review*—past, present, and future—is family. Eventually those first two rules fell by the wayside, and rightfully so. But the third and fourth live on to this day. All of us worked like dogs into the wee hours of the night, obsessed over the *Bluebook* and the *Texas Style Manual* like a sacred message from God, argued endlessly about trivial and important matters, read reams of galleys, celebrated job offers with bottles of champagne, and partied as hard as we worked. That has never changed and never will. The

1. 7 WM. MITCHELL L. REV. 313 (1981).

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Law Review changes who you are forever. The *Law Review* became our home. Working every day with people you respect and trust to overcome insurmountable obstacles and challenges creates deep bonds. These people were my friends. These people were my family. That special bond exists to this day.

The *William Mitchell Law Review* is today one of the most highly regarded journals in the country; it has been cited in countless opinions throughout the nation. The *Law Review* has generated judges, general counsel, professors, government officials, entrepreneurs, and scores of outstanding lawyers who are leaders in their fields.

Mike Steenson is our Steve Jobs. All of us have been richly blessed because of Mike's vision and determination. We are better lawyers, and we are better citizens of this community because of the *Law Review*. For forty years, Mike Steenson has served as our founder, advisor, inspiration, mentor, and friend. He is a rare breed. He is a living legend. Generations from now people will talk about Mike Steenson and the monumental effect he had on William Mitchell and all our lives. Today is the day we say thank you from all the *Law Review* generations past and all the generations to come for a practically perfect *William Mitchell Law Review*.

Reflections on My *William Mitchell Law Review* Experience

Gail Chang Bohr[†]

Being on *William Mitchell Law Review* opened doors for me and made possible the career in the law that I have been privileged to have: first, as a law clerk to A.M. “Sandy” Keith, Chief Justice of the Minnesota Supreme Court, then as an associate at Faegre & Benson and as the first Executive Director of Children’s Law Center of Minnesota, and now as a district judge in the Second Judicial District of Minnesota.

This personal essay will touch on what I gained from being on law review, my views of why my family background made me a good candidate for law review, and my thoughts on how the pursuit of justice motivated me and my colleagues on law review.

Before entering law school, I did not know the value of law review. Even though I had had a successful twenty-year career as a clinical social worker working with children and families, I still did not know what to expect from law school. I did not personally know any lawyers from whom to seek advice. I soon began to see the reason for one of the application-to-law-school questions: namely, “Is there anyone in your family who is a lawyer?”

What I quickly learned is that being on *Law Review* increased the workload, adding as it did to the already heavy reading schedule of law school. Most of the summer after my first year was spent “writing on.” I remember memorizing the *Bluebook* and being intellectually challenged in the writing of a case note—which legal issue it was I have since successfully forgotten. Even though it took time away from them, my family² wholeheartedly supported my decision. But, *Law Review* also had many benefits, and in my view,

[†] District Court Judge, Second Judicial District, Ramsey County, State of Minnesota; former executive director of Children’s Law Center of Minnesota; JD *magna cum laude*, William Mitchell College of Law; MSW, Simmons College School of Social Work; BA, Wellesley College. Bohr is the recipient of several awards, among them, the 2010 *William Mitchell Law Review* Marcy S. Wallace Excellence in Leadership Award. Bohr was editor of Volume 16 and executive editor of Volume 17 of the *William Mitchell Law Review*.

2. Husband, Richard; son, Aaron, who was 10; and daughter, Jessica, who was 5, and in preschool. She was fascinated with the idea that her mother was in school as she was. Her first question about my classes was, “Mama, do you have to raise your hand if you want to go to the bathroom?”

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was one of the best decisions I made early in my legal career. The friendships formed on *Law Review* endured, the writing and legal research improved, and the legal knowledge deepened and lasted.

My time on *William Mitchell Law Review* spanned three of my four years at William Mitchell College of Law. After becoming a staff member, I was fortunate to be elected one of the editors (Volume 16) and executive editor (Volume 17). Each step involved more responsibility and more work. Law review brought a smaller group of law students together for a common purpose which, in my view, was to solicit articles that explained existing law, posit new theories of the law, and break new ground in advancing the law and justice. But soliciting articles was not enough. We also had to produce a quality product. We had to ensure the articles were accurate, written in an understandable style, and presented in law review format. Our first job was to put the articles through rigorous citation checks to ensure accuracy—a labor intensive, time consuming, and seemingly thankless task.

We developed a system to accomplish the cite checks. I do not know if this is the system that is used now, but at the time we thought it was an efficient way to ensure the work got done and involved everybody on *Law Review*. We set aside Saturday mornings when crews of staff members, editors, executive editors, and the editor in chief would take portions of the article and check the citations for accuracy and for proper *Bluebook* format. This meant that the night before, one or two staff members and one of the editors working on that volume would make sure the sources were pulled from the library and brought to the classroom where the staff was assembled. Editors, executive editors, and the editor in chief were present to answer *Bluebook* format questions and to hunt down missing sources.

We provided breakfast and lunch to keep the crew from leaving at meal times. Food fueled our common goal and kept us going. We had to support one another and work as a team to meet our deadlines.

Adding to the Saturday morning cite-checking sessions were the many evening hours spent discussing the merits of the articles and what a new court decision might mean to existing case law. Even when we did not agree with one another, the camaraderie we had developed meant we could still work together. Perhaps because of all the sweat and toil, the friendships cultivated on *Law Review* have been life-long. After all, we were toiling for a higher

purpose—to produce a product that could have a lasting effect on justice in society—or so we hoped.

The drive for justice undergirded my decision to go to law school. As much as I loved my work as a clinical social worker working with children and families, I realized that I needed to have a law degree to fully achieve justice. William Mitchell College of Law was a natural choice because it allowed me to go to law school part time so I could still have time with my family. It was the only school I considered. As a nontraditional student, I did not feel out of place. We ranged in age from early twenties to mid-forties, some of us had had careers, and others were recent college graduates. I helped form an inter-generational study group; I was one of the oldest students and two of the youngest students in our class were also in my study group. I was the only Asian American; there were no other minority persons on *Law Review* and very few in the whole law school. I was used to being the only minority person in the group.

After all, I was born and grew up in Jamaica to Chinese parents. We, Chinese, were in the minority in Jamaica and were used to that status. Education was the only way to advance. Thus, I have always been driven by a curiosity and desire to learn that came from my family of origin. Growing up in Jamaica as the ninth child of fifteen children of Alice and Percy Chang, I was taught to value education. My mother's formal education ended in the eighth grade. She was a girl in a Chinese family, and when resources were scarce, girls were not educated. My father came to Jamaica from China as a teenager and was sent to school just long enough to learn English. It was through their sacrifice, persistence, and hard work that we all completed high school, which in Jamaica was not free; they paid school fees for all of us. Ten of the thirteen children who survived childhood completed college, and six have masters and doctorate degrees.

I grew up with Jamaican, Chinese, and Catholic values—respect your elders and take care of those younger than you. As a child, if it looked like I was being too carefree, I was always brought up short by the parental reminder—who is taking care of the children? That question was never far from our minds when I was executive director of Children's Law Center of Minnesota.

With regard to taking care of children, being an editor and executive editor on *Law Review* brought another benefit. This time in the form of an office with a desk and a telephone, as this was the

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pre-cell-phone era. The telephone was critical because if my daughter did not arrive at the after-school daycare on the school bus, it was the only way for the daycare to reach me to let me know, which did happen one day.³ Whenever I did not have a babysitter, my children would come with me to school. They made themselves at home in the *Law Review* office, doing their homework while I was in class. They got to know my law school friends, and my friends got to know them. My children are frozen in time for my friends. Even though my children have completed college and graduate school, my law school friends still ask about them as though they are still in elementary school!

Law review provided opportunity for many intellectually stimulating debates. Daniel Webster, a lawyer, said, “Justice . . . is the great interest of man on earth.”⁴ Law review advanced our search for justice. Central to our endless discussions were the questions: “what is justice” and “how do we achieve justice?” Knowing the law was fundamental to doing justice. Our job in *Law Review* was to uncover the law cited in the articles. We could find many instances of injustice and when application of the law did not achieve justice.

There was always a *Law Review* colleague with whom to have conversations about cases and about doing justice. We could pick up a debate where we left off. We had a lot of fun thinking about the law, how it applied to practical day-to-day life, and what justice meant in those everyday circumstances.

I was on *Law Review* at the time of the Minnesota Supreme Court’s reports on Gender Fairness⁵ and on the formation of the Minnesota Supreme Court Race Bias Task Force.⁶ They were current examples that we could point to in our discussions about

3. My husband, P. Richard Bohr, was Deputy Commissioner, Minnesota Department of Trade and Economic Development, and Executive Director, Minnesota Trade Office. He travelled frequently in his work.

4. See DANIEL WEBSTER, *Mr. Justice Story*, in 2 WORKS OF DANIEL WEBSTER 297, 300 (Little, Brown & Co., 6th ed. 1853).

5. See MINN. SUPREME COURT TASK FORCE FOR GENDER FAIRNESS IN THE COURTS, FINAL REPORT (1989), reprinted in 15 WM. MITCHELL L. REV. 825 (1989).

6. The Final Report for the Minnesota Supreme Court Task Force on Racial Bias in the Judicial System was issued in May 1993. See MINN. SUPREME COURT TASK FORCE ON RACIAL BIAS IN THE JUDICIAL SYS., FINAL REPORT (1993), available at http://www.mncourts.gov/documents/0/Public/Court_Information_Office/Race_Bias_Report_Complete.pdf.

justice in the Minnesota courts. We were privileged to be able to have such discussions.

Oliver Wendell Holmes, Sr. wrote, “Every now and then a man’s mind is stretched by a new idea or sensation, and never shrinks back to its former dimensions.”⁷ The *William Mitchell Law Review* stretched our minds, our attitudes, and our experiences in immeasurable ways.

7. OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES, SR., THE AUTOCRAT OF THE BREAKFAST-TABLE 256 (1906). The quote has often been attributed to his son, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr., justice on the U.S. Supreme Court from 1902–1932.