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William B. Stoebuck

University of Washington School of Law

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LUVERN V. RIEKE: IN MEMORIAM

William B. Stoebuck

This will be very personal. It must be, to get the measure of the man. Luvern V. Rieke was my teacher, confidante, colleague, and friend. He was a product of the State of Washington, from the small town of Cashmere—euphonious name, just east of the Cascades, between Leavenworth and Wenatchee, home of Aplets and Cotlets. His parents were German; it was their native language—and Lutheran, Lutheran in the marrow of their bones. During World War II, Captain Luvern Rieke was in the Army Air Corps, with service in China: a Flying Tiger. After the war, he studied a time, for some reason (probably because it was a Lutheran school), at Capital University, Columbus, Ohio. There he met and married Jane, his gracious life mate and now widow. Returning to Seattle, he received his B.S. in 1948, his LL.B. in 1949, from the University of Washington. He was Editor-in-Chief of the Washington Law Review and Order of the Coif.

Upon graduation from our law school, Rieke had plans to open a law practice in the little town of Quincy, east of the Cascades. But the law school had other plans for him; he was immediately hired as an assistant professor. His initial teaching assignments were Contracts and Domestic Relations, the courses that were to continue to be his main ones throughout his long teaching career. During the 1952–1953 school year, he took a leave of absence from Washington to earn an LL.M. degree at the University of Chicago, where he studied under Karl Llewellyn (whose fame probably brought Rieke to Chicago). Much later in his career, Pacific Lutheran University awarded him the honorary degree of Doctor of Laws. In 1956, he attained the rank of full professor in our law school. That was the year I entered our law school and had Rieke for Contracts in my first year, and later his course in Domestic Relations.

As a classroom teacher, he was one of the best in the law school, and his teaching style influenced my own. He taught with a good mixture of the so-called Socratic method plus lively, interesting lecture; and his level of teaching was intellectually challenging. But he was the exemplar of a true gentleman, never overbearing, never belittling. Approachable out of class as well as in class, he was a faculty member whom I sought for advice as a student when thinking about my career in the law.

When about to leave law practice and enter law teaching, I again sought his advice.

From the time I joined our faculty in the fall of 1967 until Rieke retired in 1986, he was my faculty colleague. He was acting dean for about two years around 1970, between the deanships of Lehan K. Tunks and Richard S. L. Roddis. That was a time of trial for the campus, the "Vietnam era," as those of us who went through it will always call it. As acting dean, Vern Rieke was a man for that time: calm, steady, of wise judgment, and through it all a fine gentleman. After his time as acting dean, he continued teaching, as before, mainly Contracts and Domestic Relations. The latter course was, I think, closer to his heart, because it involved the things about which he most cared, human relationships and how they might be bettered. He was, if I recall correctly, a principal draftsman of Washington's no-fault divorce statute. Always hopeful about human relations, he believed that, rather than making it difficult for couples to get out of a failed relationship, we should tighten the requirements for getting married.

After his stint as acting dean, Rieke remained a pillar of strength on the faculty, both as teacher and colleague, until (the rest of the faculty felt) his untimely retirement in 1986 at age 65 (the university's then-mandatory age was 70). He was trim, fit, and athletic as always, and seemed a candidate, if there ever was one, to continue on until the mandatory age. But he had other things he wanted to do with his life, things he had long done, but to which he could not devote full time. A devout Christian, of Lutheran persuasion, he was already one of the leading Lutheran laymen in America. It was mainly to devote more time to his church that Vern wanted to open a new chapter in his life.

Vern and Jane's daughter, Janice Cunningham, is a graduate of our law school and practices as an estate planner with a firm in Seattle. Their son, Paul Rieke, is a Seattle lawyer, too, though not one of our graduates. Janice's husband, John, is a lawyer, a graduate of Marquette. She had one year at Marquette when they were married, then she took her last two years at Washington and John his last year here.

After Vern retired, we missed him around the law school, where none of us recalls seeing him (though he told me he continued to do some pro bono legal work for causes in which he was interested). He and Jane attended a reception to which my wife and I invited them, less than a year and a half before his death. He was as fit, trim, and sharp as ever and looked as if he would live to be at least a hundred. Then, on the ninth of May, I heard indirectly that Vern had had a massive stroke and

Dedication to Luvern Rieke

was not expected to live. When my telephone call to his home only brought Jane's voice on the answering machine, inquiry at Janice's law office brought me the sad news that Vern had died that morning. I learned that he had just finished supervising the completion of a new wing onto their church—and the planting of some flowers around it. In a way, that seems like a fitting close to the “new chapter” in Vern Rieke's life—but it was still much too short a chapter. When Jane returned my call, she said it for all of us who knew him, “We have lost a mighty good man.”

