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Laurance Hyde, 1975-78

Ronald Benton Brown*

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Abstract

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I came to Fort Lauderdale in February 1976 to interview for a faculty position at the new Nova University "Center for the Study of Law." It was housed in the bottom floor of the Parker Building. Germ-free rats lived on the top floor. The new law school's dean was Laurance M. Hyde, Jr. Larry had been hired to be a professor, but was thrust into the deanship shortly after the law school opened. Nothing in the minutes of the faculty meetings (or anywhere else for that matter) explains how or why or when the mantle of leadership abruptly shifted to him from Dean Thornton, and no one was interested in revealing the details to the newcomers.

Larry had been a judge in Missouri—and he had both run and taught at the National Judicial College at the University of Nevada—but running a law school was an entirely different matter. For one thing, there was the American Bar Association to deal with. For another, the university was far from stable. In fact, one inspector had charitably described it as "a speculative venture." Thus Larry had to learn the law school business on the job, under fire, and in the midst of an academic earthquake.

Joining the faculty in the law school's third year was an adventure. There were third year students for the first time and we had to prepare for the first graduation. There were only seventeen professors, but that was almost double the size of the previous year and created a lot of disruption in faculty dynamics.

In those early years, the dean was practically the whole administration. He operated with only his secretary, one administrative assistant, a director of admissions, and an admissions secretary. How they managed to get everything done in those pre-computer years is a wonder. In his spare time, Larry also taught Professional Responsibility and Criminal Law to the freshmen. He rode his bicycle to and from school every day, setting the relaxed social atmosphere.

Larry is a sailor at heart. After returning to the faculty in his post-dean years, he had a poster on his door which read, "I'd rather be sailing," and I am sure that was true. He was a first-rate navigator, capable of piloting a sailboat across the Atlantic, but he was never the tyrannical sea captain so popular in literature. He would try to get the faculty talking together so we

could work out a consensus. This was no easy feat. Larry chose to downplay or even disregard most interpersonal conflicts, and frequently the conflict just went away. Larry instituted an "attitude adjustment seminar," which turned out to be a cocktail hour or, on one occasion, a wine tasting. It set the tone that cooperation and respect were to be accorded colleagues, even colleagues with whom one disagreed strongly. The Nova faculty did not then, or ever, degenerate into the armed camps which are so common on law school faculties.

Larry was always a good sport. He never took any of the faculty politics personally. At least he never let on if he did. He was always kind, decent, and patient as dean and as colleague. Despite his inexperience with law schools, Larry somehow kept the ship afloat. He navigated us through the shoals of the early years and past the reefs of ABA inspections. With Larry at the helm, we survived.

Just in case we never mentioned it, thanks Larry.