Dicta From The Dean

High Points in the Dedication Year

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"The song has ended,
But the melody lingers on."

These words from a song popular in my youth describe perfectly the memories I retain of the series of wonderful events associated with the opening and dedication of our new Law Building. These memories are like snapshots in a family photo album, they chronicle the highlights of an exciting period of growth and change. It is my plan in this column to share with you a few of my special memories of the dedication year. Nominally, I choose this topic to provide an introduction to the special section on the dedication year which follows, but the truth is I wish to tell these stories because it is fun to recount them.

The move to the new building was itself a memorable undertaking. It is said that the most difficult moving project known to mankind is to relocate a graveyard. If that is so, moving a major university law library must run a close second. Our move, which was supervised with great skill by Arthur Bonfield and Kathie Belgum, took three weeks to complete and involved a moving crew of over 50 persons on many occasions. One of my favorite recollections of the "big move" is a scene in which Kathie Belgum, clad in her bright yellow supervisor’s apron, expertly guides a long train of book trucks into just the correct aisle in the new building. Meanwhile Arthur Bonfield, wearing what he insists on calling "dungarees," is crawling on the floor in front of the procession inexpertly nailing together pieces of plywood to provide a runner to protect the beautiful new carpets. Kathie and Arthur may not be the greatest shop steward or carpenter, but together they formed a world-class moving team. They got the job done on time, under budget, and with a minimum of damage to the books and the building. Most amazingly, their computer-generated program for reordering the collection during the course of the move actually worked to land each book on the right shelf on the right floor.

Another high point in the dedication year occurred shortly after our move to the new building was completed. In June we received the eagerly awaited report of the ABA-AALS site visitation team. It would be an understatement to say we were delighted with the report. Not only did the report strongly confirm our sense of progress on many fronts, it was so pervasively upbeat in spirit that I am not sure that I could have improved it had I drafted it myself. After reading the report, UI Vice President Richard Remington was quoted in the local newspaper as stating: "I've read an awful lot of accreditation reports in my time. I've never seen one as positive as this accreditation report—in any field." The following quotation from the Report's conclusion captures the laudatory tone of the report:
"We conclude with the mild reproach that the Iowa College of Law may be hiding its light under a bushel. It remains primarily a school devoted to producing graduates from the State of Iowa and the immediately surrounding region. It deserves a much greater national reputation and a considerably more widespread student constituency. There are probably a number of the most prestigious law schools in the country, measured by the usual national rankings, which simply do not match Iowa in excellence of classroom teaching, intensity of writing and skills training and warm personal relationships with students. Yet there is not the slightest sign of complacency, and instead an eager search for improvement constantly goes on. The Dean and the faculty can be justifiably proud of their achievement."

If I had good sense, I would have ordered this ringing endorsement chiseled into the limestone entrance of the new building and immediately announced my retirement as dean. That I did neither bold act says more about the power of inertia than it does about wisdom, I'm afraid.

Another memory about the early days in the new building relates to my traditional welcoming message to the entering class. As we gathered the new students together for the first time in Levitt Auditorium, I felt obliged to supplement my usual remarks by urging the students to show their pride in the Law School's new facility by treating the building with the care and respect that they would treat their own private home. Even as I was uttering this feeble exhortation, it occurred to me that these new law students could not possibly share our sense of achievement about having realized the dream of having a great law school building in which to work. These students had never experienced the "delights" of our former home—the hall congestion, the painful wait to use the restroom, the discouraging search for an empty seat in the library, or the frustration of finding out that the book you needed urgently was unavailable because it resided in a warehouse somewhere across town. I also realized with slight sadness that there would be no honeymoon period with this entering class. Our magnificent new building would simply become their standard of what law school ought to be and they would just assume it was their entitlement to have such a grand learning environment at their disposal. Not only would these newcomers fail to appreciate their good fortunes, very soon they would begin grousing about inadequate parking, unfair carrell distribution, unequal allocations of space among student organizations, unpalatable food in the vending machines, and other indignities. Sure enough, by the end of the first month of classes, all of these complaints and others had emerged, with the most colorful grievances making the pages of the Daily Iowan.

You may have seen a humorous reference to this next memorable moment in your local newspaper. As has become our custom, the first major event at the law school each fall is Supreme Court Day. The centerpiece of Supreme Court Day is a moot argument presented by two senior law students to the Iowa Supreme Court sitting en banc. This year for the first time in over a decade, the Supreme Court arguments were held in the Law School and the 300-seat Levitt Appellate Courtroom was filled to overflowing with students and faculty.

Many in the audience were first year students and they had been carefully instructed by acting bailiff, Howard Sokol, J.D. 1967, that when the members of the court entered the room, protocol dictated that the audience should all rise. When Chief Justice Reynoldson and his colleagues arrived at the doorway, Howard banged the gavel and the audience tried to oblige. But as the court ascended the bench and started to take their seats, they were greeted by a strange moan from the audience followed by a torrent of embarrassed laughter. Only a few of us realized what had happened and it was difficult to keep a straight face. We had forgotten to tell Howard to warn the audience that the type of bench seat that is provided in the auditorium does not allow a member of the audience to stand up in place.
thigh when they try to rise, so that only a two-thirds crouch is possible. Thus when the justices entered the room, 300 people simultaneously discovered this impediment and emitted a surprised groan, then realized that everyone was experiencing the same difficulty and joined in a brief and sympathetic laugh before sitting down. It was only a momentary distraction, and the event went forward with proper dignity and decorum. Members of the court, however, were left to wonder throughout the argument what accounted for their unusual reception by the audience. After the event was over an explanation was provided the Justices, and they too enjoyed a good chuckle over the happenstance.

From the beginning of our planning for the dedication of the new building, it was a consensus objective to balance the festivities with serious academic activities. My colleague Shelly Kurtz did a marvelous job in organizing the symposia lectures and getting out the many invitations that were issued to the special events he and his Dedication Committee had helped plan. The Symposium celebrating the Bicentennial of the U.S. Constitution was a timely opportunity to bring outstanding scholars to campus to discuss important issues and acquaint themselves with our community. The three half-day sessions held in October and November were highly successful in all respects except student attendance. We cancelled classes to allow the students to attend, but all but a handful apparently found more important things to do with their free time than discuss the day's burning constitutional law issues. So it was that when renowned legal philosopher Professor Ronald Dworkin of Oxford and NYU came to the school a few weeks later to deliver a major lecture on the concept of equality, I had fears of introducing this celebrated scholar to an empty lecture hall. Instead, Levitt Auditorium was filled beyond official capacity for Dworkin's talk. I cannot explain this counter-intuitive behavior. I know, however, that it was a tossup between me and Professor Dworkin over who was more surprised and pleased. I got the distinct impression that he was not accustomed to addressing standing-room-only crowds either.

Friday evening after the Bicentennial Symposium, the first dinner event of the dedication weekend was held at the Holiday Inn with about 250 guests in attendance. Thinking that six hours of serious academic discourse was probably enough for one day, I invited a well-known native Iowan to deliver some light-hearted after-dinner remarks. Dean and Professor Emeritus Willard Pedrick was kind enough to accept the invitation and he did not disappoint us. In his highly entertaining talk, Ped advocated allocation of space in the new building to three bizarre organizations that exist only in his fertile imagination. It is a tribute to his comedic talent that the audience had to listen very carefully to detect the bogus character of such entities as the American Institute of Legal Jurimetrics, on whose behalf Ped and Chicago colleague Walter Blum have been authoring tongue-in-cheek tax reform proposals for over 20 years. (One of their all-time bests is the "negative estate tax.") What else would you expect of a senior citizen who hustles every academic crowd by passing out cards identifying himself as an "Itinerant Law Teacher" whose motto is "Have exam, will travel?" Excerpts from Ped's remarks are included in the special dedication section infra.

The dedication weekend in mid-October was so hectic that it is little more than a blur in my memory. As the big day neared, my life became unbelievably cluttered with unexpected, but important, details, such as arranging extra security for Justice Blackmun, employing a band to provide live ceremonial music, deciding the order of introduction of platform officials (Does a Governor come before or after a Supreme Court Justice?), and figuring out how and where to move the ceremony indoors, if the weather did not cooperate.

Because it was such a critical concern, my most vivid memory of the entire dedication morning is the spectacular Indian Summer day it was our good fortune to experience. I do not believe I have ever seen the Iowa sun shine more brightly or the skies appear more brilliantly blue than they did on that once-in-a-lifetime October morning when we dedicated our new law building. (It may just be that mental numbness heightens the sensitivity of the physical senses.) The beautiful weather was made all the more notable by the uncommonly gloomy
conditions that had prevailed steadily for six weeks prior to the event. As I told the assembled throng that morning, it was difficult to avoid interpreting the dramatic weather change as a sign that the Iowa Law School was continuing to do things right in someone's eyes.

In retrospect, I suspect that having my attention diverted to worrying about the weather and a multitude of other minor problems was actually a blessing. If I had more time to reflect on the big picture, I may well have been paralyzed from sheer terror. I don't think I fully appreciated the full weight of the responsibilities I had assumed until after marching in with the platform party and stepping to the podium to welcome the audience of over 700 persons and begin the program. It suddenly struck me that all these people were expecting me to conduct this important ritual with smoothness and self-assurance, even though most of us on the stage had never done this precise thing before. I remember thinking: Don't panic, it's just like teaching a new subject—those people out there don't realize that you don't know what you're doing and as long as you can keep it that way everything will turn out all right.

It is at the point of this strategic insight that the haze begins to fall and my memory of the 1 1/2 hour ceremony becomes quite indistinct. I have seen the videotape of the proceedings, so I know I was there in the center of things, recognizing honored guests, introducing speakers and generally providing continuity to the program, but if electronic evidence did not exist, it would be hard to convince me that I actually conducted the proceedings. What fleeting memories I do retain are principally of distractions and minor gaffes. Early in the ceremony a steamline broke at the nearby power plant and created a loud and annoying wail that all of us had to try to talk above for the balance of the program. Later I remember thinking what a fraud I was as I claimed familiarity with a musical number played by the University's brass quintet that I wasn't sure I had ever heard before. I also recall receiving a note in mid-ceremony from Dan Ellis observing that, although we had duly expressed our gratitude to platform officials from the Executive and Judicial branches of state government, we had overlooked the Legislative branch almost completely. I hastily ad libbed a brief tribute to the brave members of the Iowa General Assembly, who had voted to undertake this ambitious project during the darkest days of the farm crisis. Later, when I viewed the videotape I was pleasantly surprised to see that this impromptu recognition came across as reasonably coherent and not obviously an afterthought.

As the last item on the program I conveyed to the audience architect Gunnar Birkerts' regrets that illness prevented him from attending the event, and closed the ceremony by reciting a poem about the new building composed by Birkerts:

"Is it now?\nOr\nIs it past?\nOr\nIs it future?\nOr\nIs it aiming\nFor timelessness?"

Instead of "space city," I said "space ship" (too many Star Trek episodes), a mistake that probably changes the meaning of the poem in some ludicrous manner. Fortunately, only Gunnar would recognize the error or know its significance, and he wasn't there to correct me.

We are publishing, in the special dedication year section which follows, excerpts from a number of the speeches that were delivered during the dedication weekend. Among those published are Justice Blackmun's after-dinner remarks at the Dedication Banquet. Even in cold print Blackmun's words are quite eloquent, but this is truly one of those cases where you had to be there to appreciate the full impact of his presence. Justice Blackmun and his wife Dotty were without question the stars of the dedication weekend, pushing into a supporting role even the gleaming new building that everyone had come to admire. The
Blackmuns attended every scheduled event, and initiated several unscheduled events of their own during the three days they visited Iowa City. Whether it was at the dedication ceremony itself, the dinner events, the 3-hour private meeting with the student body or a 2-hour seminar with the faculty, they were the center of attraction wherever they went.

For me, Justice Blackmun's most magic moment was his after dinner speech on Saturday night. We had prevailed upon him to deliver some brief after-dinner remarks. He responded by giving us a serious speech, which most of the audience found compellingly interesting and at times, quite moving. Here was one of our own, a lawyer from the Midwest, who had achieved the highest position in our profession, yet who was so down-to-earth and so humble about his accomplishments that it was possible to admire him without being awed or intimidated. Even those who are sharply critical of views championed in decisions he has written could not help but be impressed by Blackmun's thoughtfulness, gentleness and obvious concern for the human factor in the application of law's coercive force.

After marveling at the way the Blackmuns threw themselves into the weekend's activities, all of us involved in planning and dedication events reflected upon how fortunate we were that their long-awaited visit to Iowa City could be timed to coincide with our dedication ceremony. It is difficult to imagine that anyone could have exerted a more powerful influence over the entire weekend than did Harry and Dotty Blackmun.

We had barely caught our breath from the dedication weekend when it was time to mount another festive occasion. The ceremony for naming the new building and recognizing the major contributors to the building fund was a smaller and less publicized event, but it had its own special qualities that made it every bit as memorable as the dedication weekend. Although the ceremony was held in the late afternoon of a week day, Levitt Auditorium was packed with over 400 friends and colleagues of Sandy and Susan Boyd.

As I looked out over that sea of familiar faces, it struck me that almost everyone who had played a significant role in shaping the destiny of the University of Iowa during the last generation, had been drawn together by this opportunity to recognize the Boyds' incomparable contributions to the Iowa City community. I told the assembled group that this event was nothing more or less than a family reunion of the University of Iowa family; and it was obvious to me that everyone in the room felt the same way. I seriously doubt if we will ever hold another event in the Levitt Auditorium in which so much warmth and genuine affection radiated among all of the participants.

There were only three short speeches, but each was a gem. Architect Gunnar Birkerts, who was unable to attend the dedication because of illness, colorfully described his relationship to a new building as comparable to parent and child. By the time Gunnar finished drawing out his metaphor, I doubt if anyone in the room doubted that his wallet was bursting with pictures of the Boyd Law Building, his newest offspring. President Freedman then took the podium and did his usual splendid job in recounting the accomplishments of Boyd's professional career, including the highlights of his 12 years as president.

Then it was Sandy's turn. His remarks were perfectly suited to the occasion. He stressed the importance of conducting legal training within the context of a university that is strong in liberal arts and the humanities. He reflected on his years at Iowa and recited the contributions of many of the law school's legendary figures. His speech was both informative and entertaining; his tone ranged from serious to witty. The consensus of those in attendance was that Sandy had never delivered a better talk. Excerpts from his remarks are included in the special section that follows.

The speeches were excellent, the food and drink were fine, but it was the heightened sense of camaraderie that caused people to stay on and enjoy each others' company long after the scheduled ending time for the event. Boyd's name will be linked with the Law Building for a period of time so long it is hard for the mind to grasp it. What is easy to understand, however, is that the complex of emotions—nostalgia, sadness, joy—that surfaced during the naming ceremony will be relished by our memories as long as we live. The opportunities to participate in such landmark events are rare and most of us felt privileged just to have been there and played a part in something so memorable.

There are numerous other high points of the dedication year that could be added to this brief collection, but one has to stop somewhere. I am sure everyone who participated in the many activities has similar favorite stories. It was a glorious period during which the new building held up beautifully and the law school community acquitted itself nobly in staging a series of events, which were dignified yet fun for all who participated. Hopefully, the special section which follows will allow the alumni and friends of the school, who were unable to travel to Iowa City, to at least enjoy reading some of the fine presentations with which we were favored throughout this memorable period.