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Robert B. Yegge - A Remembrance

ROBERT B. YEGGE—A REMEMBRANCE

VED P. NANDA[†]

Dean Emeritus Robert B. Yegge will be long remembered for his outstanding accomplishments. During his incredibly productive life, he managed to create a lasting legacy, not only at his alma mater, the University of Denver Sturm College of Law, but for legal education and the legal profession, as well. And that is not all, for the range and scope of his activities covered a much broader terrain. From serving as an honorary trustee at the Colorado Academy and on the National Science Foundation and the Luce Foundation committees, he led a host of civic and community organizations. All the while, he was generous to a fault and touched many lives. He left a large circle of friends who will sorely miss him.

I.

In the fall of 1965, Bob Yegge, just thirty-one years old became acting dean when he succeeded Harold Hurst. That was the year when I joined the College of Law faculty as a rookie from New Haven. I was new to Denver and had informed some of the University of Denver ("DU") faculty who interviewed me that I intended to keep my options open after a year, as I had offers from other schools on the East Coast that were willing to wait for me for a year if I wished to relocate.

After graduating *magna cum laude* from Princeton University and earning an M.A. (Sociology) and J.D. from DU, Bob had started teaching at DU as an instructor in Law and Sociology (1959-62) and as an adjunct associate professor and director of the Administration of Justice Program (1962-65). After serving a year as acting dean, Bob became Dean, the youngest law dean in the United States. He served in that capacity until 1977, when he was named Dean Emeritus.

Bob Yegge brought dynamism and excitement to the College of Law during his term as acting dean. He asked the faculty to closely examine the traditional legal curriculum and embarked on the process of introducing interdisciplinary studies to enrich the curriculum by systematically adding the fields of sociology, economics, general semantics, and international relations.¹ He identified goals and tasks for the school: that

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1. See Robert B. Yegge, *Our Diamond in Rough*, 44 DENV. L.J. 307, 309 (1967) [hereinafter Yegge, *Our Diamond in Rough*].

it "should be a place for teaching the accumulated tradition of the law and further teaching about what the practitioner of the future might expect to encounter"; that it should be a research center that encourages and supports "research necessary to maintain our legal institutions and our profession in the stormy years ahead"; and that it should be "a leader in community involvement and community action."²

He shared his vision with faculty and students, who were equally inspired as he undertook the mission of achieving these goals deliberately, boldly, and with passion. He selected eminent scholars and creative minds from all over the country to attract to DU and proposed innovative programs in the Administration of Justice, Trial Advocacy, and Natural Resources, among others. These were promising new developments and he began his efforts in earnest toward moving a very good regional law school to the ranks of first-rate national law schools. His enthusiasm was infectious, and the practical steps he had already taken sufficed for me to decide to stay in Denver for a while; and I am still here, never regretting the decision to stay.

The next several years were indeed stimulating. In a couple of years Bob doubled the number of full-time faculty from thirteen to twenty-six. Among the notable new faculty members were William M. Beaney, who held the endowed William Nelson Cromwell law professorship at Princeton University, chaired Princeton's political science department, and was one of the nation's best-known authorities in Constitutional Law; H. Laurence Ross, who chaired the department of Sociology and Anthropology at New York University; and Wilbert Moore, President of the American Sociological Association. Christopher H. Munch, who was a professor and chairman of the Department of Law at the United States Air Force Academy, joined as Bob's associate dean.

During the summers of 1967 and 1968, Bob revisited the academic programs of the College of Law, bringing members of the bench, bar, and the community concerned with legal education, along with the involved faculty and students, to begin long-range planning for several programs, including the Administration of Justice, Business Planning and Taxation, International Legal Studies, Natural Resources, Professional Responsibility, Urban Affairs, clinical programs, and dual degrees. During the 1967-68 school year, several alumni activities were centered on the theme of the 75th anniversary of the College of Law, "The Responsible Professional in a Changing Society." In the fall of 1967, the activities focused on "The Professional as a Keeper of Law," while the focus for the winter of 1968 focus was on "The Professional as a Creator of Law," and spring 1968 on "The Professional as Administrator of Law."

2. Report of the College of Law 1967-68 to the Chancellor of the University of Denver 1 (1968) (on file with *Denver University Law Review*).

Several conferences were held, including one jointly sponsored with the American Council of Education on "Legal Aspects of Student-Institutional Relationships" and another co-sponsored with the American National Red Cross and the American Society of International Law on "Humanitarian Law."

In 1968, Dean Yegge reported that the College of Law had joined Harvard, Yale, Northwestern, Columbia, the University of Chicago, the University of Wisconsin, and the University of California at Berkeley in "having the largest amount of grant and contract research in American legal education."³ The College of Law was designated as one of the Russell Sage Foundation centers for the study of Law and Society, along with Harvard and Yale Law Schools as the newest such centers.⁴ That year the United States Office of Education gave to the College of Law its first ever grant to any American law school for a study on improvement of the legal curriculum.⁵

The College of Law developed dual degrees with other academic units of the University to gain depth of interdisciplinary knowledge through concentrated course work and independent research in specific subject areas identified for concentrated legal studies. These areas were administration of justice, natural resources, international law, and business planning, leading to J.D. and M.A. degrees in such subjects as Sociology, Psychology, Economics, Political Science, International Studies, and Geography, and J.D. and M.B.A. and J.D. and M.P.A. (Public Administration and Judicial Administration) degrees.⁶ With a grant from the Walter E. Meyer Research Institute of Law and the Russell Sage Foundation, the Association of American Law Schools and the Law and Society Association designated the University of Denver College of Law to conduct its first summer institute entitled "Social Science Methods in Legal Education" ("SSMLE") in 1967. These SSMLE institutes gave the College of Law singular national prominence. The goal was to train experienced law professors from across the country under the direction of eminent legal and social science educators in innovative law teaching methods and concepts.⁷

Bob Yegge stated that during his first year as dean the emphasis was on building faculty strength⁸ and that the task of the College of Law was to train lawyers who "by their contact with the main currents of legal and social thought, will have gained the power of analysis, the power of judgment, and the devotion to rational inquiry which are the precious possessions of those who are not prisoners of their time and place . . .

3. *Id.* at 6.

4. *Id.*

5. *Id.* at 7.

6. *Id.*

7. Yegge, *Our Diamond in Rough*, *supra* note 1, at 314-15.

8. *Id.* at 315.

[and] true professionals who will continue to learn throughout their lives.”⁹ During the 1970s he assiduously attended to the task of assembling gifted teachers and known scholars who shared and skillfully implemented his goal of training lawyers as “true professionals.”

His successful efforts from 1965-70 to strengthen and enhance the clinical programs at the College of Law and to establish an enduring partnership between law and behavioral sciences led Bob to explore in 1970 a similar partnership between law and pure sciences. He noted that College of Law students who had worked with those in other disciplines and had benefited from the College’s “systematic fusion of social science methods and knowledge into the legal curriculum,” had come to the realization that “law is inadequate to handle all social problems.”¹⁰ He made this statement in his introduction to a symposium issue of the *Denver Law Journal* based on papers from a conference of experts in science, technology, and the law whom Dean Yegge had gathered at the College to explore the possibilities and to “engage[] critically and constructively in the business of considering the implications of science [and] technology on legal process.”¹¹

Bob Yegge had initiated an innovative diversity program that my colleagues John Moye and Pat Serna have so eloquently described in their tributes. And he had instituted the path-breaking MSJA/MSLA program, also highlighted in John Moye’s tribute. The College of Law became the academic home of the newly-created Institute of Court Management, the product of an American Bar Association-Johnson Foundation task force formed in response to Chief Justice Warren E. Burger’s call that ten or twelve of “the best informed people in this country [should] plan a program to train the large number of [professional court] managers [and administrators].”¹² Robert Yegge, then a member of the board of directors of the American Judicature Society, was one of those selected in that group.

Among the numerous other programs and projects that blossomed under Bob Yegge’s leadership, I will mention here only three—the International Legal Studies Program, the Natural Resources Program, and the Master in Taxation Program. The planning sessions of the ILSP at Yegge Peak—where laughter and joyful camaraderie mingled with serious discussion—are legendary. The participants still recall those special times with great delight.

Bob Yegge completed his term as a highly successful and effective Dean. His twelve years at the helm of the College of Law had led to the

9. *Id.* at 307.

10. Robert B. Yegge, *The Implications of Science-Technology for the Legal Process -- Introduction*, 47 *DENV. L.J.* 549, 552 (1970).

11. *Id.* at 551.

12. Robert B. Yegge, *Thirty-Five Years and Still Counting*, 26 *JUST. SYS. J.* 186, 187 (2005).

realization of his dream—he indeed had transformed a very good regional law school into a great national law school. In addition to these many contributions to the College, Bob acquired special gifts from lawyer-philanthropist Frank H. Ricketson, Jr., and broadcasting legend Lowell Thomas, which enabled the school to move to the Park Hill campus in 1984.

II.

Bob did not sit on his laurels after he became Dean Emeritus. He continued to teach and write with undiminished zeal and energy as a professor of law. And when the University again called on him to lead the College he cheerfully answered the call and assumed decanal duties during 1997-98. Among his interests was the new field of preventive law, which he strongly advocated. He served as Vice-President and Executive Director of the National Center for Preventive Law at the DU College of Law, which then-Dean Edward A. Dauer and his collaborator, Professor Louis M. Brown, had established as a non-profit organization for the advancement of research, teaching, and practice in the field of preventive law.

He continued to be prominently engaged in a plethora of professional activities. He chaired several boards and served as a member and in an advisory capacity on numerous boards and editorial boards, including those of the American Bar Association, National Center for State Courts, American Judicature Society, National Council for Arts and Education, Law and Society Association, the Henry Luce Foundation, and the American Foundation for Temple Bar. He received dozens of national and international honors and awards recognizing his achievements and contributions.

III.

In spite of his demanding professional commitments Bob Yegge still had time to become deeply involved in service to the community. He chaired the boards of several distinguished civic organizations and served on many others. These included the Colorado Council on the Arts and Humanities, Mile-High Chapter of the American Red Cross, the Colorado Prevention Center of the University of Colorado Health Sciences Center, Denver Urban Observatory, Colorado Legal Education Program, Metropolitan Denver Legal Aid Society, Colorado Legal Services, Colorado Academy, and an organization that held a special place in his heart, the Denver Dumb Friends League.

IV.

On a personal note, Bob was a dear and close friend. He was my daughter, Anjali's, godfather. His mother, Fairy, considered me as her son. I vividly recall a dinner at a Japanese restaurant where Bob, Fairy,

and I were together when Fairy called me, as she used to do, "son." The Japanese waitress looked at us in surprise and asked Fairy, "Are these your sons?"—Bob, pale and blonde, and I a deep brown. The waitress, without missing a beat, said, "Ha! I see—the same noses!"

My wife, Katharine, and I particularly relished the opportunity to travel in India with Bob as part of an educational trip I was leading, seeing Bob totally at home, as always, yet in a very new and foreign setting.

In January this year Bob was supposed to address the Association of American Law Schools' annual meeting in Washington, DC. His friends expressed their shock and grief to me, as have so many in this city who still can't believe that his booming laughter and his fond "Hi, Kiddoes," will never be heard again.

Bob's Christmas parties, his Santa Claus outfit, his constant efforts to make others happy, are some of the many special traits that I will always remember. I cannot forget Bob's days in the hospital during his illness. Every day I would hope that things would improve—and every day he and I would say that he was going to beat the harsh reality that so slowly became apparent. And even his surgeon, Dr. Craig Brown, practically broke down when he told us Bob wasn't going to make it. These are some of the indelible imprints on my mind that I continue to recall.

Bob was a man of resolute character, courageous and resilient beyond belief. He never lost his sense of humor. As I said above, he was generous to a fault, selfless, and loyal. Time and again you could hear the tender care for others expressed in a matter-of-fact way that was pure Bob. He will always remain a role model for me and for countless others.