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2000]

THE FIRE'S CENTER

JAMES L. MCHUGH*

I think continually of those who were truly great. . . The names of those who in their lives fought for life, Who wore at their hearts the fire's center. Born of the sun they traveled a short while toward the sun, And left the vivid air signed with their honor.¹

I first encountered these powerful, thoughtful words of Stephen Spender in a college poetry class. They resonated greatly at my initial reading and often came to mind as I observed people in the world about me. Fifteen years later I found these same words inscribed upon a painting by Betsy Stewart, an extraordinary contemporary American artist. The painting now hangs in my home, a combination of the genius and wisdom of two of my favorite creators. And when I look at the painting and reflect on Stephen Spender's words, memories of a third great talent frequently spring forth: Harold Gill Reuschlein, the founding Dean of the Villanova School of Law.

Harold Reuschlein was indeed unique. He was a fascinating, eccentric and charming combination of talents, wisdom and wit. Creating a new law school in the 1950s was thought by many to be impossible. But he did it. And even in its early years Villanova was a very good law school. And he laid the foundation that led to it becoming a great law school.

Harold recognized that there were two essential keys to a great law school: faculty and students. I don't know how he was able to attract such talented teachers as were on the faculty when I arrived in 1959, but we students certainly owed him great thanks. The faculty challenged and inspired us and gave us remarkably clear visions of what real lawyering was and how we might do it.

Harold also had a lot to do with why many of us students chose Villanova over the more established schools with higher reputations. My first contact with Villanova Law School was a telephone call from a good college friend who was then a first year student. He told me it was a challenging place with a terrific faculty, interesting fellow students and a fascinating Dean. My next contact was a telephone call from Harold himself. Fifteen minutes on a telephone with Harold was certainly unique, and he convinced me.

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1. Stephen Spender, *I Think Continually of Those Who Were Truly Great*.

When I arrived at Villanova I saw more of Harold's uniqueness. His Franklin Roosevelt style of speech, his interest and talent for music, his appreciation of fine foods and spirits and the other aesthetics of everyday life, his direct frankness and candor, his connection to the moment and, as always, the eccentricities. He set a tone and a style that pervaded the entire Law School and made it a delightful place to be a student. Somehow the Law School seemed to blend a very real, practical, down-to-earth approach to legal education with an air of elegance.

Harold did not abandon us once he lured us to the school. He found financial help for several of my colleagues when they needed it. He was a factor in connecting many of us with our initial jobs. And he did these things in resourceful ways. For example, recognizing that this new school did not yet have the alumni network that would eventually be very helpful to new graduates commencing careers, he convinced some of the area's most prominent attorneys to serve on this new institution's Board of Consultants. And once he had them on board, he wasn't the least bit shy in using them to help the school and us.

And even once we left the School we did not escape Harold's focus. During our third year he often lectured us on the fact that after we graduated he would continue to pursue us for contributions, and he most certainly did. And Harold's loyalty to Villanova did not end when he retired as Dean. He continued to seek every opportunity to lecture us on our obligations to the School. When he approached us it was usually in his amazingly blunt manner, but he also did it with his almost always-present touch of humor that only made us like him all the more. When we visit the law school in the future and attend reunions we will indeed miss Harold. His loss is also magnified by the recent death of his wife Marcella, an immensely talented, charming and caring person. She was a good friend to the students and she played a significant role in supporting and complementing Harold's skills and charms. They are both greatly missed.

In the words of Stephen Spender, Harold Gill Reuschlein was "truly great." He wore at his heart "the fire's center." And indeed, Harold traveled "toward the sun, and left the vivid air signed with [his] honor."