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Gordon D. Schaber, Real Life Hero

Eugene F. Scoles*

Gordon D. Schaber was a genuine hero who reached out to people, sharing his time, experience, his life and love for fellow human beings. We often think of our heroes as great warriors or political leaders but the real life hero is one who by his own initiative and personal effort seizes the opportunities available in his time and place to make an unusually significant contribution to the good of others, and, does so with humility.

In today's world, one rarely has the opportunity to know and enjoy an individual who has had the person to person influence for good in as many different contexts as Gordon D. Schaber. Gordon cast his influence on others in many different roles. He had personal contact with others as a lawyer, as a judge, as a community leader, as a political worker, as a humanitarian, as a scholar, and as a legal educator. A person who saw him in only one of these activities would be favorably impressed while unaware of Gordon's many other dimensions. Many saw him as a law teacher who engendered mutual admiration and affection. Gordon knew and called more students by name than most of us have met and forgotten. He could have made a good reputation as a classroom teacher but circumstances cast him in other activities as well. I knew him mostly as a legal educator through activities outside the classroom. His broad gauged views were apparent when, in addressing a specific matter, he would offer for consideration the perspectives of others likely to be effected. All of his life experiences contributed to his great ability and he left a monument as evidence of that ability—the McGeorge School of Law. For forty years, in the mind of most who know it, McGeorge was Gordon Schaber. Scarcely a year out of law school, Gordon became a part-time assistant dean and law teacher at McGeorge, then a struggling night school on the borderline of continued existence. Within three years, while not yet 30, he was dean and thus began his 35 years as dean of McGeorge, one of the longest tenures as a law school dean in the United States.

The enormity of the accomplishment reflected in McGeorge's development under Gordon Schaber's leadership is difficult to comprehend considering the complex and difficult path to achieve accreditation, recognition and respectability for a free standing law school unsupported by either a parent institution or public funds. Key to this success was Gordon's appreciation of the intricate and important relationship between legal education and the other important participants in our legal system, i.e., the bench, the bar, the legislature, and the community. By his seemingly boundless energy, he was continuously involved in all of these groups

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concerned with law and in turn involved them in McGeorge to the mutual benefit of all. His practice experience in his law firm, Schaber and Cecchetti, brought a practical perspective to legal education and its relationship to the organized bar reflected in the clinical program at McGeorge. His experience as a judge was evidenced in the model courtroom built and used at McGeorge and so influential across the nation. His lifelong involvement in activities of the organized bar built bridges of cooperative law reform efforts between legal education and the bench and bar. Gordon was also always deeply engaged with his broader community, particularly in health, humanitarian, and political matters. These experiences enriched his view of law and legal education and gave impetus to an enhanced program at McGeorge as well as expressions of appreciation and recognition by the broader community. Gordon Schaber's genius was his appreciation of the significance of these many diverse influential elements of law and the legal system and his efforts to bring them together in the educational setting.

Gordon early recognized the importance to the McGeorge School of Law, of peer appraisal, and respect, and concentrated on building a high quality educational program with an exceptional faculty and first rate facilities. Over the years, he successively shepherded McGeorge through the basic state and national accreditation processes. Then, as the faculty developed and its scholarly recognition increased, membership in the prestigious Order of the Coif and the Association of American Law Schools. Meanwhile, Gordon was organizing and encouraging outside funding to reduce reliance on tuition and to assure that person of limited or moderate means in the community had access to McGeorge. His personal appeal and effort in fund raising is reflected in the large number of modest gifts across the broad spectrum of the community with which he interacted.

McGeorge's reputation and standing progressively extended beyond Sacramento, beyond California, and even beyond the United States as international education and exchange programs added to its stature. In order to bring the benefits of university affiliation to McGeorge's students, Gordon negotiated the present association with the University of Pacific. As anyone who has gone through any of these processes can attest, one of these accomplishments during a decadal tenure is quite remarkable; for one person to successfully orchestrate all of them is truly outstanding, if not unique in the history of legal education in the United States. Certainly, this accomplishment will never be repeated.

The activity perhaps making the most significant national impact on legal education in the United States was Gordon Schaber's unstinting service as a member of the American Bar Association Section on Legal Education and Admission to the Bar. This Section is the liaison between the national bar and legal education. Gordon was active in many ways but his long and largely unsung service on committees concerned with accreditation and accreditation standards had a constructive influence on many law schools. This was particularly true of new law schools seeking initial accreditation. With these schools his advice, backed by his own experience, carried persuasive weight. This resulted in improved educational

programs and their improved understanding of the significant mix of good teaching, scholarship, facilities, and hard work that goes into effective legal education of capable students.

These accomplishments brought Gordon Schaber the recognition of his peers in many segments of the society around him. Most parts of our legal system recognized Gordon's contribution to them in some fashion. While this personal and institutional recognition was always appreciated by Gordon, probably the recognition most personally satisfying was the American Bar Association's Robert J. Kutak Award that he received in 1991. The prestigious Kutak award is granted annually to an individual who meets the highest standards of professional responsibility and demonstrates substantial achievement towards increased understanding between legal educators and other branches of the legal profession. This is a fitting description of Gordon Schaber's life work.

All of Gordon's professional activity reflected his character and personality. He was always calm and pleasant, even when faced with unpleasant tasks or personnel problems. He considered personal friendship and courtesy to be of great importance though not sufficient to cloud his professional judgment. He was generous of his time and resources and counted lifelong friendships among all of the different groups with which he had contact. He could differ and debate with others and still maintain his friendship and regard for them. This view was reciprocated by most of those with whom he dealt and was evidenced by the friendly exchanges from any group of students, employees, or others when they met him.

Gordon Schaber's personal life, vexed without complaint by long-term affliction, was enriched by his friends. He enjoyed, indeed reveled in the warm atmosphere of pleasant gatherings hosted at his home or elsewhere. Although childless, he had a strong family closeness with his mother, ward, and close associates. The warmth of his thoughtful greetings and sincere concern for others permeated his relationships. As a person, he enjoyed the game of life; he accepted the cards dealt him and played them well.

Those of us fortunate enough of have known this man who was so many things to so many people, while saddened by his departure, know that the world is truly a better place because of Gordon Schaber.