

WITH GRATITUDE AND GREAT FONDNESS: REMEMBERING PETER HENNING

ERIC KADES[†]

Peter Henning started at Wayne State University Law School in 1994, a year before I arrived. He set the bar for new faculty dauntingly high: he was elected professor of the year by his students in his first year of teaching, and I believe that he had published two articles by the time I came to Detroit.

Peter played an outsized role in my formative years as an academic. Despite his impressive early successes, Peter had not a smidgen of arrogance. He was a model senior colleague from day one, patiently and generously sharing insights on teaching, research, and fitting in with the faculty. To this day I can trace many core facets of my teaching methods to Peter's mentoring: using current news events to illustrate the legal topic du jour, leavening rigorous application of the Socratic method with compassion, and using straight lecturing for topics less amenable to conversational learning.

My scholarly interests do not intersect with Peter's, but we did read each other's drafts, so I know something of his work. Peter cared about the real world, how things actually worked. He had a great nose for understudied topics of practical importance. After analyzing the topic carefully, thoroughly, and rigorously, Peter always offered creative but practical—a tough combination—reforms to remedy shortcomings in the law.

Peter in turn reviewed my drafts, and, as always, he was a model colleague, generously taking the time to read and re-read them carefully and make suggestions large and small to shore up gaps in the argument and to clarify denser passages.

His exemplary collegiality extended to that most joyous and edifying domain of academia, faculty meetings. As a neophyte, I went into these proceedings with the simple-minded notion that one listened to both sides of an issue and decided which was in the best interests of the law school. Early in my career, however, I recall several occasions on which Peter did what truly wise legislators do: he suggested creative compromises that identified some common ground for opposing factions. In our polarized country where compromise has become a dirty word for too many, Peter advocated with a voice of reason for conciliatory bargains that gave everybody something but nobody everything. Those of you who know law faculties will be unsurprised to hear that his conciliatory third-ways did

[†] Thomas Jefferson Professor of Law, William and Mary Law School.

not always carry the day. Both law faculties and the world need more Peter Hennings who understand the critical value of meeting others halfway.

On a more personal level, Peter was a treasured friend. Soon after arriving at Wayne Law, my family and I moved into a house on Bishop Road in Grosse Pointe Park about two blocks from the Hennings. We spent enough time together, both in each other's homes and at the community pool, that I came to know something of the Henning family dynamics. Peter was a very smart guy, who did many smart things, but by far the smartest thing he did was marrying Karen—and he knew it. Through all the inevitable and sometimes even healthy speedbumps of marriage, Peter's love and adoration of Karen could not have been clearer.

Peter was a model father, and I learned a lot by watching him in action, both in my personal life and at work. He was kind but firm, extraordinarily patient, and openly affectionate. His three adorable little girls, Molly, Allie, and Grace are now wonderful grown women, each of them kind, thoughtful, and engaging. Like nearly all scholars who choose to parent, Peter's true legacy is his children, his three lovely daughters.

Peter had serious thoughts about becoming a Catholic priest. That of course is a noble calling, and I am sure that Peter would have tended to his flock with great humanity and compassion. Given his comprehensive skill set, he might well have become a bishop. We now know, however, that the opportunity costs would have been high for Karen and his colleagues and existential for his children! Peter's choice of a secular academic life has blessed us all.

Given that we only saw each other three or four times over the last decade and corresponded irregularly, I am truly shocked at how much I continue to miss Peter more than a year after his passing. He was a great guy in every respect, and that is exceedingly rare. He is one of those colleagues and friends who cannot be replaced.