

It's the Little Things



Donald G. Rockwell

I've had months to contemplate my year as president of our bar, and my mind keeps returning to two individuals who did something for me that, I'm sure in their eyes, was completely inconsequential—but something I remember distinctly and will forever appreciate.

It was in 1969 that I decided to take the law school admissions test and, depending on a hopefully decent score, apply to law school. I had a problem, however, because neither my parents nor I happened to know a single lawyer, let alone two lawyers, who would be inclined to write the required two letters of recommendation on my behalf.

As chance would have it, in 1970 I began dating Diane, my wife of 42 years. Diane's uncle was none other than Bush Trembley, who, Diane informed me, was a successful lawyer, an unsuccessful candidate for circuit court judge, and a past president of the Genesee County Bar Association. Bush had five sons (one of whom is still successfully practicing law) and four nephews. It obviously didn't hurt that I happened to be dating the only female of the nine cousins as well as Bush's only niece. Luckily, I was able to engage Bush enough that he said he

would be pleased to write a letter of recommendation for me. Recommendation letter number one was in hand.

I knew the second letter of recommendation was going to be problematic. Even now, 47 years later, I still recall almost verbatim my dad telling me that the attorney who wrote my parents' will, a Ralph Gault, was deceased, but he believed that Ralph had a brother by the name of Harry Gault who had an office in downtown Flint.

I called Mr. Gault, and he was gracious enough to meet with me at his office. I can still visualize him sitting in his office looking like I imagined a lawyer would—neatly dressed in his perfectly fitted suit, his office particularly uncluttered and organized, and a smile companioned with rimless glasses.

Although the office and circumstances were intimidating to a young person like me, Mr. Gault could not have been kinder or more welcoming, and I became comfortable talking with him. Even though we had no connection other than his brother's drafted will for my parents and my nascent desire to go to law school, Mr. Gault devoted an hour to asking about my background and why I thought I wanted to be a lawyer. It was then that Mr. Gault looked at me and said, "You appear to be a fine young man, and I will be happy to write a letter of recommendation."

I was delighted, relieved, and most appreciative, to say the least. I walked away

with his letter of recommendation, and that was the last time I saw Mr. Gault. He died the year before I was sworn in as a lawyer.

I was surprised to learn years later that Harry Gault was a former president of the Genesee County Bar. Many additional years later, when I joined the SBM Board of Commissioners, I was *completely* surprised to learn that Mr. Gault was also a former president of the State Bar an amazing 70 years ago and the only president from Genesee County.

Mr. Gault never mentioned anything about his background during my one encounter with him. He was only interested in talking about me. Suffice it to say, I am humbled to be the second president from Flint—especially after having the privilege of spending one hour with Mr. Gault many years ago.

I ask myself why I'm thinking about Bush Trembley and Harry Gault during these early days in my year as president. I'm not sure I can clearly articulate the reason, but I sense it's because of the most admirable stature they enjoyed in their legal careers, yet they still took time and were interested in who I was and what I wished to be before I ever walked into my first law school class.

Perhaps it is also because of two little things such as letters of recommendation, gestures that are much more than little things to me. ■

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