No One Exceeded the Abilities of Professor Gromley in the Classroom

By Daniel Buksa
Editor

The Valparaiso University School of Law community experienced a void during the past holiday season. This void was caused by the sudden death of Professor Charles Gromley on December 5, 1992.

Gromley, known and loved for his relaxed teaching style, had been instructing law students at Valpo since 1960. During those 32 years, he developed a reputation as a friendly, caring and highly competent professor. Widely respected by both his colleagues and students, he was elected class advisor four times in the last decade.

The son of Daniel and Lena Gromley, he was born May 24, 1925 in Dixonville, Pennsylvania. Gromley was a World War II veteran, serving his country in the Navy. After his discharge, he went to college, receiving his Bachelor of Arts Degree from Kent State in 1948.

After graduation, Gromley decided to go to law school. He received his LL.B (the equivalent of today’s Juris Doctorate) from the University of Kentucky in 1951. He subsequently received his LL.M from Georgetown in 1953.

On September 4, 1953, Gromley married the former Norma Shipe. They had three sons: Colin, Kevin and Bret.

Prior to coming to Valpo, Gromley worked as a staff attorney in the Solicitor’s Office of the United States Department of Agriculture. He began teaching law in 1954 at the University of Nebraska. He taught at Willamette Law School from 1955 to 1960. He also spent 1978 teaching at the University of Tennessee.

Gromley’s areas of specialization were Property Law and Trusts and Estates. He was admitted to the Kentucky bar. A baseball aficionado, Gromley spent much of his free time watching game he knew and loved.

Gromley is survived by his wife, three sons and a sister. His funeral was held December 8, 1992 at the University’s Chapel of the Resurrection, Reverend Daniel Brockopp officiating. He was buried in Marion Center Cemetery, Marion Center, Pennsylvania.

Who Owns Blackacre?

The high degree of my nervousness was probably apparent. It was August, 1990, and I was walking into the law school for my first class. The scene was 9:00 a.m., Room A, Property I, with Professor Gromley. Section B became silent as the smartly dressed, distinguished looking gentleman walked in and went down to the front of the room.

In the classroom, knowledge was offered to the students as are the words from a Grandfather reading a story to his grandchildren. Real Property was his favorite story. He knew it well, as if he was the original author. For thirty-two years he told the same story to a new crop of VU Law students. But to close each semester he found a new twisted ending to bewilder his class. His exams were respected, even feared, but no matter the grade - no one uttered a vulgarity towards the man in the corner office.

In a review class he was interrogated about a past exam question which was troubling many students. Professor Gromley’s eyes lit up as his face lightened with a content little grin. A few whispered chuckles escaped before he lifted his hand, pointing to all, yet to no one at all. “I knew I’d get a few of ‘em on that one," he fondly recalled. His happiness was not found in the suffering of the students, but in knowing that he challenged the students to a higher level of knowledge.

For every hysto to flow from Professor Gromley’s lips, there is a memorable story he once told. Many papers could be filled with these stories, but a sole story read at his funeral will suffice.

One day Sandy Koufax was on the mound for the Dodgers. The pitcher blazed the first one right over the heart of the plate, but the batter never saw it whiz by. Strike one! Sandy roared back and heaved another fast one. Strike two! In came the third one. Strike three! The batter turned to the ump and said, “that one sounded a little high," Unadenored humor was his treasure.

The School of Law has announced a Charles Gromley Memorial Scholarship Fund and has renamed the Teacher of the Year Award as the Charles Gromley Distinguished Teaching Award. Charles Gromley was a man dedicated to the good of the students. Many students have discussed possible appropriate measures to ensure this man is properly honored. Current ideas include a plaque, a statute, or naming the law library in his honor. Any suggestion and support are welcomed.

Professor Charles Gromley was once asked about his retirement plans. He smiled and replied, “I know there’s a few of ‘em up there eyeing the corner office.” The corner office will be occupied again, but never again will one man, one professor mean so much to so many.
A Sign of Greatness

A man said to the universe:
"Sir, I exist!"
"However," replied the universe,
"The fact has not created in me a sense of obligation."

Stephen Crane

The sign of a great man or woman is how long and wide their life is remembered. I will always remember Professor Gromley. During the spring semester of last year, Professor Gromley attempted to tutor me in the greatest mystery of life, property law. He spent anywhere from an hour to two hours each week with me, discussing property. As long as I needed to talk, he was there for me.

Now, for those of you who were not in my section, the first professor of my first year was Professor Gromley to me. He was the first professor of my first class. There were 3L, 2L, and 1L. The class was quite large, 150 students. He was the dean of the law school and in life.

The first time I went to Gromley's office it was early last semester. I remember the cozy feeling I had as soon as I stepped into his office. When I knocked on the door he was sitting behind his desk with his eyes closed, but upon my interruption, he opened his eyes and welcomed me in.

I quickly felt as comfortable as I have in my grandparent's den. I almost forgot what question I had come to ask him, but even if I had it would not matter because Professor Gromley would just spend some time getting to know me.

Before I could ask my question, he asked me my name and where I was from. I have since learned that my initial experience was the rule with Professor Gromley and not the exception.

Professor Gromley's accessibility was not limited to asking questions from his classes only. I spent a good deal of time with him early last semester discussing a personal interest and his advice was helpful and inciteful.

I feel lucky to have had the opportunity to be taught by Professor Gromley. He was an excellent educator, mentor and a friend. He will not be far from my memory, especially the next time I read an old Indiana case and wonder, who gets it? I will certainly miss Professor Gromley and send my best wishes to his family.

Lynda Sloane 2L

There's a Lot to Be Said About Greatness

There's a lot to be said about greatness. The ability to communicate and appreciate the world that surrounds us. I have met very few people can listen and care for others as Charles Gromley. He was a gift to everyone in this law school, and the community. His presence was felt throughout this law school and his time on this Earth will never go unnoticed. Thank you for being who you were and for the gift of inspiration which can never be returned.

"There's some people that you don't forget even though you've only seen them one time or two. In the end, my dear sweet friend, I'll remember you." B. Dylan.

R. Smith 3L
Eternal rest grant unto him O Lord,
May your light shine upon him.

Charles Gromley
1925-1992
We Remember

About ten years ago, Professor Gromley and I would sit in a basketball game when a stranger, who had struck up a conversation with Charlie, asked, “And what do you do for a living?” “I’m a teacher,” Gromley said simply and without hesitation. “A teacher. Not a ‘lawyer.’ Not a ‘law school professor.’ Not ‘VU teacher of the year.’” All true. But not exactly the way Gromley saw himself. He did not on the other hand say with feigned modesty “Just a teacher.” I don’t think he would ever put just a in a sentence that already contained “teacher.” He said he was a teacher because that is what he was and that is what he was proud of.

Could Gromley teach? To mention some of his heroes: Could Lee outflank ‘em on their left? Could Clemente hit a home run? Could Gromley, with a well-aimed overhead projector in class, and he said, “Naw, I’d probably trip on the dang cord.”

Several years ago, a 1L student posed a bizarre, convoluted set of facts and said to Professor Gromley (with two or three other students watching with amusement), “Now, I’d argue that B wins here. Do you think a court would buy it?” Gromley reached behind him, pulled a book from the shelf without looking, blew the dust off, opened to a dog-eared page, and slid the book to the student. “Don’t know. But this court in Arkansas didn’t buy it in 1938!” As adept as he was at this quick analysis and uncanny recollection, he liked best the stories in which his students were the stars. After all, while he could surely perform, he was not a performer; he was a teacher. Professor Al Meyer and I often talk nostalgically about the VU law school of the 60s, an intimate place with a tiny faculty of incredibly devoted and gifted teachers. Savage, Jox, Stevenson, Hiller, Jones, Bartelt, Wechsler, Meyer, Gromley. A lineup! Most of the time, I would often cap these discussions with the line, “Ah, Berner, there were GIANTS in those days!” And there were. And none was bigger than Gromley. His passing leaves me with inexpressible sorrow. I learned a lot more from him than Property and so did everybody else. He was the consummate teacher. And while he is now gone, so long as VU law students of the past thirty-odd years walk the land, he will never be forgotten. Since 1964 I have never been able to think about The Rule Against Perpetuities without smiling, because the Rule, like so many things, cannot be dissociated from the giant who first taught me about it, who cared for it, who thought it needed to be protected, who cared that I learned it. And now, when I think of it, there will be tears too; but the smile will last longer.

-Bruce Berner

Dean Berner is Assistant Dean of Valparaiso University School of Law. He is also a 1966 alumnus.

While my contact with Professor Gromley was distant as a student (one class), I came to know this professor as a teacher, leader, a professional and person when I came to Valparaiso University School of Law to work in the Admissions Office. As a student, I don’t remember making a trip to his office, but once I began working in admissions, I don’t think there was a week when I didn’t walk down the hall to his office, plop a file on his desk and say “what do you think about this one.” Charlie (as I came to know him) would sit back in his weathered-leather chair, pull out the comb from inside his top drawer and say, “let me think about it,” or “let me talk with the others about it,” or “this one’s a hard one, isn’t it?” But, in reality, he always had the answer.

And then there were those applicants that somehow found out that Charlie was the Admissions Committee Chairman; these applicants would give him a call, drop him a line, or better yet, show up at his office door. Charlie never got frustrated, but in the true Charlie style, met with them, offered advice, and sent them away much more comfortable with their goals. And there were those summer days in the office when few faculty members were around and “admits” kept visiting campus to meet with faculty advisors; Charlie was always around, or made the time to come in.

In the past four years, I observed the “legend” talking with students, seeing the true “open door” policy professor in action, and I wished that I had come to know him as a teacher before I worked here. I am thankful that I had the chance to learn from him as a professional. I remember being at one of our Alumni Board meetings when the topic of admissions came up and Charlie came along with some comment, I truly didn’t remember what his comment was, but I remember leaning over to Kathy Wasling and saying, “when I get frustrated with things around here, it’s people like Charlie that make working here absolutely worth it.” I never had the pleasure to know Professor Stevenson and while I’ve met Professor Bartelt, I don’t know him either, but I hear that they are among the “legends” at this law school. A student came into my office to talk about the loss of Professor Gromley; I am just glad that these students had the chance to learn from this man and to know this legend.

-Mary Beth Lavezzi

Ms. Lavezzi is Director of Admissions for Valparaiso University School of Law. She is also a 1989 alumnus.

The Forum staff would like to express its condolences to Mrs. Norma Gromley &

The Gromley Family

We share your loss

January 15, 1993
Charlie Gromley
In Memoriam

Norma, and Kevin, and Collin, and Bret, and, and Charlie Gromley has loved so well over 32 years in this university, I need to state the truth: his father and brother was well loved by all of us. It has been a great honor to have been in the presence of this sweet and gentle soul, and we shall all miss his wonderful, gracious presence.

In the ancient world servants had distinctive roles. Charlie Gromley embodied the attributes of three of these kinds of servants: teachers, heralds, and missionaries.

First, there were the pedagogues, the slaves who—like Aesop—did their best teaching by telling stories. When the slaves were asked if they were an anecdote or two that Charlie told? The beauty of Charlie’s humor was that it was never directed at another, but was simply calculated to tickle the funny bone and raise a laugh. And when he did aim a story at someone, the moral was so subtle that his target sometimes missed the point of his comment. But he would never pound home his point or insist on it; he just shrugged his large shoulders when such a person just didn’t get it. Which reminds me of one of Charlie’s favorite stories, drawn unsurprisingly from the nation’s pastime, and almost as important to Charlie as the nation’s history.

On this day Sandy Koufax was on the mound for the Dodgers. The pitcher blazed the first one right over the heart of the plate, but the batter never saw it whirl by. Strike one! Sandy roared backed and heaved another fast one. The batter fouled it away from the plate a third time. Strike three! The batter turned to the ump and said, “That one sounded a little high.”

"Charlie Gromley embodied the attributes of three of these kinds of servants: teachers, heralds, and missionaries."

Charlie will be well remembered as a teacher’s teacher. I was going to say “blessed” but it is too much trying, but the truth is that he always worked hard at being an excellent teacher. So good was he at his job as a teacher that it is more fair to say that all of us who knew him, whether as students or his colleagues, learned at his knees without trying very hard. My greatest joy as Dean of our law school was to confer on him the award of "Teacher of the Year" last May. The only hesitancy that I had in reestablishing this award in our law school was how I would ever be able to present the award to another colleague; fine as my colleagues are as teachers, none exceeded the abilities of Charlie Gromley in the classroom. We shall henceforth call the Charlie Gromley Distinguished Teaching Award. At the time he received this award, and of dozens of alumni, we have also established a Charles Gromley Memorial Scholarship Fund, an appropriate way in which to memorialize Charlie, since the fund will benefit the part of our community whom Charlie loved so dearly, the students.

Second, there were heralds in the ancient world. Sometimes these servants were noted for the trumpet blasts that accompanied the announcement of their messengers’ presence (Is. 62:1). Sometimes, as we will hear shortly, they accomplished their task not by loud crying or by raising their voices, but by their quiet patience and endurance (Is. 42:2). In either case these servants did not trumpet their own personalities or herald their own achievements, but simply made sure that the world did not miss the exciting news of the presence of a friend.

Charlie Gromley was just such a servant. Because Charlie was a person of so few words at faculty meetings, when he did get around to speaking, the rest of us listened. The most loquacious Charlie ever got was when he was happy to have his students and commending our alumni to employers for their excellence. In this respect, he was a true herald like Will Rogers — Charlie Gromley never met a person he didn’t like.

"Every dean should be so blessed as to have a Charlie Gromley as a level-headed counselor."

Third, there was another kind of servant in the ancient world. I have called them missionaries, "travel agents. These servants attended to all the particulars of journeying, which was a pretty hazardous thing to do in the ancient world. Before coming to the United States, when I was a graduate student in Manhattan to join the crowds at dockside wishing well to those about to embark on a great voyage. Rodbars calls out to an unknown voyager: “So long, Charlie, have a wonderful time!” We who were privileged to know Charlie, Gromley, and who share his faith that in Jesus we have a servant who is an excellent teacher, herald, and missionary, can now greet him with full confidence that he has gone on ahead to prepare a place for us. "So long, Charlie, have a wonderful eternity!"

-Edward McGlynn
Gaffney, Jr.
8 December 1992

Dean Gaffney is Dean of Valparaiso University School of Law. The preced­ ing eulogy was given at the Charles Gromley, Sr. Memorial Service. At the time he received this award, and of dozens of alumni, we have also established a Charles Gromley Memorial Scholarship Fund, an appropriate way in which to memorialize Charlie, since the fund will benefit the part of our community whom Charlie loved so dearly, the students.

At times, the mind works like a Rolodex. By flipping through the collected consciousness, we are able to define concepts and ideas by tapping some significant experience, occurrence or acquaintance. The more vivid an image is, the wider its reference base becomes.

To me, any time I need to visualize ethical conduct, or to better understand what it means to care and giving it all about, or to articulate what community means, I will recall the image of Professor Gromley.

It’s not that the Professor and I were good friends. In fact, by any standard, we were not really friends at all—merely acquaintances. Yet I can honestly say that the Professor was a friend to me.

Many times I sat in his office while he lent an ear and a sound bit of advice. Many times I heard the Professor helping students find employment. Many times I sat in the Professor’s class and marveled at seeming endless lists of problems which he could posit regarding the exercise of simple black letter rule. In all these instances, it was Professor Gromley giving.

Other than the enjoyment I suspect he derived from these circumstances, I never saw the Professor expect or accept anything in return. Perhaps this is why he was such a great man.

From time to time we will be confronted with difficult problems. At these times we will reflect upon our past and often come to our time in law school. And Professor Gromley will still be giving.

-Dr. Dillworth

Mr. Dillworth is an attorney in Illinois and a 1992 alumnus of the School of Law. He also served as Editor-in-Chief of this publication during the 1991-1992 academic year.

"People grow old by deserting their ideals. Years may wrinkle the skin, but to give up wrinkles the soul. You are as young as your faith, as old as your doubt; as young as your self-confidence, as old as your fear; as young as your hope, as old as your despair. In the central place of every heart, there is a recording chamber; as long as it receives messages of beauty, hope, cheer and courage, so long are you young. When your heart is covered with the snows of pessimism and the ice of cynicism, then and only then are you grown old."

-Charles R. Gromley
The more times change, the more they stay the same. Professor Gromley teaching a property class in 1966.

The Forum

deadline for next issue is
Thursday, January 14 at 5:00 p.m.
All articles must be submitted on diskette
The Forum's diskettes on reserve at the library reserve
desk may be utilized
Letters to the Editor should be limited to 250 words
All other articles should be cleared with the Editor
before-hand

Blackacre, from Front Page

The man who was to spend the next year teaching us about the Rule Against Perpetuities introduced himself. It quickly became apparent that I and my classmates had little to worry about: we were in the good hands of a warm and caring individual. I was always amused by the number of different variations that Professor Gromley could put on one hypothetical. But one thing was for sure, you KNEW that when you went to take the bar, you would have no problems at all with the property and trusts & estates section.

I was taking Trusts & Estates with him last semester. He had not changed a bit from the past couple of years when I would hand deliver to the faculty, Professor Gromley always told me how much he liked it. I always appreciated that. He also provided me with a couple of stories and supplied some positive, constructive criticism. He was perhaps the only faculty member who I felt to be a kindred spirit. I will miss him. God Bless you, Professor Gromley!

-Daniel Buksa, 3L