

Summer 2019: Tribute to Valparaiso University Law School (1879-2019)

Memories of Valpo Law School's 125th Anniversary Gala: May 1, 2004, Field Museum, Chicago

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MEMORIES OF VALPO LAW SCHOOL'S 125TH ANNIVERSARY GALA: MAY 1, 2004, FIELD MUSEUM, CHICAGO

Clare K. Nuechterlein*

The evening of May 1, 2004, was a magical one in the history of Valparaiso University Law School. That date marked the 125th anniversary of the School. So after a year of planning, a Gala, celebrating in grand style, was held in the Great Hall of the Field Museum in Chicago.

Several hundred alumni and friends of Valpo Law attended the black-tie affair. Revelers renewed friendships, and new friendships were sparked by the occasion. Folks traveled from all around the United States for the Gala event. The evening included a lavish seated dinner as the University orchestra serenaded the revelers. The beautiful setting in the Great Hall of the Field Museum provided a sparkling backdrop to the evening's event.

The keynote speaker, President George H. W. Bush, was the highlight of the evening. Dean Jay Conison asked my husband, Christopher, Valparaiso Law Class of 1976, and me to be the president's greeters and escorts. We awaited President Bush's arrival to the private room in the Museum where his Secret Service detail brought him to meet us. We had not met the president beforehand, but we have a friend who is a close friend of both Presidents Bush. That mutual friendship provided us with a nice way to open the conversation.

I've been struck by the many remembrances shared recently at the passing of President Bush, as people from all walks of life recollected his kindness, sincerity, and approachability. We experienced the same qualities as he made us feel immediately at ease with his warm personality. At the time, Mr. Bush was on the eve of his 80th birthday. He excitedly shared with us his plan to celebrate his upcoming birthday by parachuting out of an airplane. News reports several weeks later confirmed his safe skydiving adventure.

The Field Museum was hosting an extensive exhibit from the Forbidden City in Beijing, China. President Bush had served as the United States' special envoy to China in the 1970s, when the United States and China were exploring establishing diplomatic ties. Knowing that Mr. Bush had a special interest in China, Chris, the museum's curator, and I escorted the president through the beautiful exhibit. At the end of the exhibit tour, we escorted him to a receiving line of University dignitaries,

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where he warmly greeted dozens more excited Valparaiso Law alumni and friends.

President Bush's keynote speech at the Gala was tailored to Valparaiso Law's history and presence in the professional community. His address was warmly received. A small but meaningful gesture that bespeaks his warmth occurred after dinner when he slipped away from the Great Hall to greet the several dozen guests who were seated in an overflow gallery nearby. He shook hands and greeted those in the "B seats" with sincerity and grace.

The Gala evening was indeed magical and well reflected the first 125 years of the fine law school that was Valparaiso University Law School.