

A REMEMBRANCE OF DEAN W. GARY VAUSE

Ruth Fleet Thurman*

It was obvious from the start that Gary Vause was going to be a superstar. When Gary and I began teaching at Stetson University College of Law in September 1975, as assistant professors of law, Gary was also hired as our new Assistant Dean, replacing the now late Calvin A. Kuenzel, who was returning to full-time teaching after serving in that position for several years.

In those days, we had just two deans and several administrators, chiefly the business manager, librarian, head of buildings and grounds, registrar, and admissions director; sometimes, the latter two positions were handled by the business manager. Other administrative functions were handled by faculty committees. For example, during my first three years at Stetson, I was simultaneously chairman—nobody called us chair in those days—of the following committees: Alumni, Placement, Continuing Legal Education, Financial Aid, and Honors and Awards. In addition, I was in charge of Publicity and Graduation, and I taught all of the first-year Research and Writing courses.

I mention my assignments—all of which I vividly remember and loved—as an example of the heavy demands on teachers in the mid-1970s. These were the days before new teachers were given lighter teaching loads and summer research grants. Most of us taught summer school to make ends meet. And that was what made Gary so remarkable. He was able to squeeze in significant scholarship from the start. He wrote articles for the *Florida Bar Journal* and was editor of a monthly article for the Labor Law Section of The Florida Bar. That was just the beginning. Before long, his publication credits included articles and books, many translated into foreign languages, a number of which he himself spoke, including Mandarin Chinese and Portuguese.

* © 2003, Ruth Fleet Thurman. All rights reserved. Professor of Law, Stetson University College of Law. B.A., Smith College; J.D., Stetson University College of Law; LL.M., Columbia University.

If I could pinpoint one quality that made Gary remarkable, I think it would be his intense focus and ability to listen. Every time I met with him, I was struck by the fact that he was listening to every word I said, as if it were the most important thing in the world. Sometimes, this made me self-conscious, and I chose my words with care because I realized, “Gary is really listening to me.”

His responses were equally remarkable—focused and insightful—showing incredibly good judgment and fairness. It is no wonder that he was a successful arbitrator and mediator and pioneered Stetson’s course in Alternative Dispute Resolution and our Center for Excellence in Dispute Resolution. These same qualities were evident in the superb reports he wrote as a faculty member and as a dean. These reports were beautifully crafted and well-reasoned. They promoted consensus and helped bring to fruition some of the law school’s major programs, such as, our Master of Laws in International Law and Business and the Tampa Law Center and Campus.

I always marveled at his accomplishments and once remarked to his marvelous wife, Celia, that I did not know how Gary was able to be so productive. She replied, “Oh, he works very hard.” She said he would go into his study and work without interruption until she tapped on his door, and he invited her to come in and sit down. She told me he gave her his full attention, and after awhile, thanked her for her “visit,” whereupon she would leave, and he would go back to work.

They were simpatico. He was a perfect Dean and she was a perfect Dean’s wife. Together they made tremendous contributions to Stetson and to all of our lives. We will always be grateful and treasure them in our hearts.