

Reflections on My Father, Professor Stan Laughlin

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I write this piece as a tribute to my father, Professor Stan Laughlin, who died in October of 2018. When you are child, you do not know that everyone's family is not like yours. I thought every family discussed legal issues at the dinner table, that legal topics were common at all social gatherings and that on Sunday mornings you watch local talk shows on which your Dad debated topics like the First Amendment and the death penalty.

My Dad has always been a huge part of my life and the study and teaching of the law was always a central part of his life and by extension mine. Growing up my Dad held his weekly seminar at our house, so that we spent the evening quietly watching TV upstairs and hearing the discussion below. As time went on it became less common for professors to hold seminars at their homes, but my Dad, as the faculty advisor to the Ohio State Law Journal, continued to have the members of the Ohio State Law Journal over to the house for brunch at the end of each school year. As a child, each vacation began with a stop by the law school to check my Dad's mail and each trip ended with a stop at the law school to pick up any mail. Blue exam books were often scattered in the trunk of the car so my Dad could grade exams on vacation. We spent several summers living in different towns while my Dad taught in the CLEO summer program for minority students entering law school. My Dad taught a semester at the University of Hawaii, allowing our family to live in Kailua and attend school in Hawaii. From his work in the legal clinic at the University of Hawaii, he became interested in how the United States Constitution applied in American Samoa and other affiliated jurisdiction of the United States. This was an area of the law largely unexamined, particularly in the context of agreements to preserve the local culture entered into between the United States and the jurisdiction. This area of law became the focus of his legal research and writing and resulted in trips to various U.S. territories and other parts of the South Pacific, many in wonderful locations with warm climates and sunny beaches. This worked well for my Dad because besides the law, his family (and baseball), my Dad loved a sunny day and the beach. I have never known anyone one was able to bring together so well all the things he loved into a successful career. His research in American Samoa allowed me to travel with him to American Samoa one summer, where we socialized with the Chief Justice of the High Court of American Samoa and his family and met several Samoan chiefs. My Dad loved nothing more than to spend the evening discussing legal questions and learning about the legal system in Samoa. We were originally staying in the Rainmaker

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Hotel, the only hotel in American Samoa at the time, but the Chief Justice quickly moved us to a government owned house near his house.

After my first job in the Ohio General Assembly, I decided to attend law school at The Ohio State University, now known as the Moritz College of Law. My Dad could not have been happier, in part because he had loved law school and in part because he thought nothing was more interesting than the study of law. My Dad attended the Ohio State University College of Law, graduating in 1960. Before I started law school, one of the best pieces of advice my Dad gave me was to read everything assigned, attend every class and write down everything the professor says. He explained that as a law student, I would not always know what were the important parts of what the professor was saying, so I should write it all down and later I could figure out what was important. He also told me that although some professors, including himself, enjoyed a good debate in class, the exam was not the place to show a professor that you knew more about a topic the professor has spent his life studying, so on the exam give the analysis that is consistent with what was taught in class and not your new unique legal theory. His advice served me well. In addition, when I started law school I felt like the professors spoke my language (or maybe I spoke theirs, having grown up with professor for a dad).

My Dad taught law at Ohio State from 1968 until he retired in 2012 at the age of 78. He retired because of my mom's health issues and continued to teach at least one class a year. He was happiest when he was teaching a class and planning his class discussion and activities. Thinking about the law and teaching students engaged him in a way that nothing else did. He encouraged me to become an adjunct professor at the college of law, something I did and have never regretted. I often asked him questions about teaching and giving and grading exams. He loved to discuss these issues and his advice showed me his dedication to his students and his desire to properly teach them how to analyze and learn about the law. His philosophy was that if a student was willing to put in the effort to learn a concept or analyze an issue, there was no limit to the time he was willing to spend with them. He maintained contact with many of his former students his entire life and watched their success and progress with the pride of a parent. His ability to remember students that he ran into and to recall specific interactions with them from classes years ago often amazed the students. As a lawyer myself, I meet other lawyers who had my Dad as a professor and they universally recall him as a great professor who cared about his students. His students from the 1970s ask if he still wears Hawaiian shirts and puka shell necklaces (this was the time period after we had spent half a year in Hawaii). Although he stopped wearing Hawaiian shirts to class, he continued to wear Hawaiian shirts, with one of his favorite being a scarlet and gray Hawaiian shirt with The Ohio State University logo, combining two of his great loves: Hawaii and Ohio State. My Dad loved the law school and the entire Ohio State University. I remember being at my parent's house on a Saturday morning as my Dad was leaving to attend the University Senate as a faculty representative. He was so happy to have been reappointed to the University

Senate, as it was his second term. As a young working mother I was thinking maybe there is not a lot of competition for assignments that have monthly Saturday meetings. But for my Dad there was not really a line between his “job” and his life, as the studying of law, the college of law and the university were as much a part of his life as trips to the beach, family birthdays, and baseball games.

He set the bar high, but as an adjunct I attempt to bring the same level of interest in the law and the students that my Dad had every day. It has always seemed to me that my Dad can recall every student he ever had, every case he ever read, and every legal issue he ever debated. He taught me how to approach legal and non-legal issues in a logical analytical manner, a skill that has served me well in both my professional and personal life. As we faced difficult health issues with my mom, the best diversion for my Dad was to discuss legal topics of the day or from his past. I had asked him a legal question related to my job a few weeks before his death, he gave me his legal opinion off the top of his head, but said he would be happy to research the issue in more details. That is my Dad, always interested in the law, always ready to help his daughter. Although I miss him greatly, I am influenced by him and what he taught me as a lawyer and a person every day of my life.

