

ACTIVIST, SCHOLAR, ADMINISTRATOR

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All those who saw you report to me that you have undergone a tremendous transformation and have become almost angelic in nature. This worries me. For while I would like you to be a good boy and to become a good man, I should regret it if you lost your high spirits, your great energy, and even your mischievousness.¹

When Larry Hellman was a very young boy, he and his mother would spend part of their summers at the Turk's Head Inn in Rockport, Massachusetts (Rockport's finest resort, I should add, until its destruction in the late 1960s and early '70s – it was a long process). Columbia Law School's Jerome Michael did the same, and he and Larry became friends, the half-century-and-then-some age discrepancy notwithstanding. In 1948, their visits to the Inn were not contemporaneous, hence the letter excerpted above. Larry had become a favorite of the staff and regular guests of the Turk's Inn, and it was these reporters upon whom Michael relied in his assessment of four-year-old Larry as dangerously angelic.

I don't know if Larry was a good boy – though, for good or ill, it's hard to believe he wasn't. But he's certainly a good man. And I do think

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1. Letter from Jerome Michael to Larry Hellman, Aug. 6, 1948. Professor Michael was a celebrated teacher and scholar – lauded upon his death by the likes of Herbert Wechsler, Felix Cohen, and Mortimer Adler, and a co-author of Adler's and Wechsler's as well. See Mortimer J. Adler, *Jerome Michael*, 53 COLUM. L. REV. 310 (1953); Felix S. Cohen, *Jerome Michael*, 53 COLUM. L. REV. 312 (1953); Herbert Wechsler, *Jerome Michael, 1890-1953*, 53 COLUM. L. REV. 301 (1953); MORTIMER J. ADLER & JEROME MICHAEL, *CRIME, LAW, AND SOCIAL SCIENCE* (1933); JEROME MICHAEL & HERBERT WECHSLER, *CRIMINAL LAW AND ITS ADMINISTRATION: CASES, STATUTES, AND COMMENTARIES* (1940). I noticed this handwritten letter, framed on Larry's OCU office wall, many years ago. The excerpted language is on the back of the double-sided letter, invisible to the well-behaved office visitor.

Professor Michael was on to something with his references to “high spirits” and “great energy.” Larry certainly has depressing reserves of the latter. And if by “mischievousness” Professor Michael meant something like a willingness to stand on principle when it wasn’t easy, or to shake things up in unconventional ways, he captured a good bit of the essence of the Larry Hellman that was to come.

Larry is like a dog with a bone. A really talented dog and a really complex bone. There is no other way to explain his thirteen years as our law dean.² No one has served in this capacity as long as Larry. And it wasn’t as though we made it easy. We faculty are not a particularly easy crew. The university was resource-strapped. It was not some sort of blissful unawareness that caused Larry to want the job. Idealist though he is, hard realities have never escaped him. He wanted the job because he sensed what he could do for us and what he could help us achieve together. What we did together was quickly become an AALS member school, more thoughtfully address diversity issues, and professionalize our administrative staff in effective and humane ways. I discuss some others below.

Larry’s efforts as Dean were tenacious. They focused, of course, on students and faculty. But these and other efforts centered as well on those whose voices the law too often fails to hear or to heed. To my knowledge, Larry has never taught a course related to criminal law.³ But he was the moving force behind the creation of the Oklahoma Innocence Project. We say about this sort of thing, “He would not be told no.” Larry was told no again and again, and in many different ways. And that didn’t matter. He had the idea, he did the grunt work, he interested others (including John Grisham and Barry Switzer), he raised the money, and on and on until, *ex nihilo*, the Project opened and began its important and successful work. So too with his efforts regarding a clinical role for our students in immigration law practice. Larry’s – well, dogged – fundraising was record-breaking, and it went toward our work on innocence, immigration, Native legal issues, pro bono and public interest fellowships, student scholarships, and expanding the faculty.⁴ To provide a sense of scale, here are a few

2. Well, certainly there are other – and surely more elegant – explanations. But I’m committed to this one.

3. I am ignoring here Larry’s perennial counsel that legal ethics relates to all legal subject matter. And maybe to everything.

4. In addition to establishing innocence and immigration clinics, Larry expanded our Native American Legal Resource Center (now the American Indian Law and Sovereignty Center), increased federal and state externship opportunities, and established our Pro Bono

suggestive metrics: under Larry's leadership our student scholarship funding increased by 600%, applications for admission by 100%, and enrollment by over 20%. I leave unenumerated the great majority of things that Larry helped us accomplish during his long decadal tenure, overcoming along the way funding constraints, (occasional) faculty resistance, institutional inertia, competing university priorities, and contested conceptions of our best future.

When Larry is convinced something needs to happen, he is unrelenting. This stems not from hubris, but from long and careful deliberation with others and, importantly, with himself. He routinely pursues his vision of the good without surrendering to the temptation to just get along in the short term with, or please, others – administrators, faculty, supporters, students, whoever. So Larry, as dean, was a tough fighter and then some for a fair share of limited university resources, a strong advocate for clinical education, an unwavering champion of pro bono service, and an undeterrable force for community outreach and international engagement. He risked personal relationships and professional advantage in fighting for these and other causes and did so unwaveringly. This kind of courage is, understandably, rare.

Larry is, of course, an influential scholar.⁵ He is a creative scholar as well, whether melding the worlds of law practice, law students, legal ethics, and the formation of professional values⁶ or theorizing, over forty years ago, about the future role of law schools in social justice.⁷ But he is also a generous scholar. Never forgetting where he came from, he has continuously shared his legal insight with his Oklahoma, Oklahoma County, and Oklahoma City communities. He did this in ways familiar to legal academe (legislative witness, program organizer, presenter, panelist, speaker, advisor, committee chair, consultant) and less so: for nearly thirty years, he authored a monthly column on timely and timeless legal ethics issues for a county bar publication. In each of these capacities, he was as interested in establishing dialogue as in pressing his own views;

and Public Service Program and the Dean's Summer Public Interest Fellowships.

5. For a collection of his selected works, see https://works.bepress.com/lawrence_hellman/.

6. See, e.g., Hellman, Lawrence K., *The Effects of Law Office Work on The Formation of Law Students' Professional Values: Observation, Explanation, Optimization*, 4 GEO. J. LEGAL ETHICS 537 (1991).

7. See Hellman, Lawrence K., *Considering the Future of Legal Education: Law Schools and Social Justice*, 29 J. LEGAL EDUC. 170 (1978).

sometimes he sought only to do the former.⁸ Continuously, he forged connections between the law school and the bench and bar and wider communities.

This past July, my wife Betsy and I “attended” a surprise birthday party for Gay Hellman. It was a virtual affair, as these things are these days.⁹ Ignoring the otherwise interesting linguistic issues bound up in questions of whether we “attended,” went “to,” or were “at” the party, the thing that was notable about the affair – or one of them, anyway – was that we were “with” people from all over the United States. And from London, and from Belgium, and from, well, it went on. Larry and Gay were our first friends in Oklahoma City, and it seemed to us then, as now, that they knew nearly everyone. I mention Gay’s party not simply to make a record that Betsy and I were “there.” But we were, and I want that noted. I mention it also because Gay has been so signally important in Larry’s career. Gay, of course, has had her own impactful career in the morally critical and perennially frustrating area of immigration law – specifically, asylum and family-based immigration work for Catholic Charities.¹⁰ Anyway, unsurprisingly to those who know them, the Hellman’s firm and worldwide friendship footprint and network of professional relationships are among the things that have enabled them to contribute so mightily, and so uniquely, to our community, our law school, and our university.

In talking to people about Larry, another – perhaps more subtle – leitmotif emerges. People talk about his warmth in action, his quiet reaching out, his often private efforts to help. Betsy and I have experienced these, as have many others. Robert Henry – who served as Larry’s dean and later as his president, and who characterized Larry’s deanship as transformational and his legal ethics scholarship as deserving of its widespread acclaim by virtue of its sheer inventiveness – speaks at equal length about Larry’s caring disposition, including the conscientiousness of his pedagogy. The first thing that noted legal historian Alfred Brophy, formerly of OCU’s law faculty, recently recalled – among much else – was Larry’s steady kindness.

8. Of the many examples of this, one of the more complex is Larry’s immersion of legal scholars from China in the lives of the law school and Oklahoma’s legal community. See Hellman, Lawrence K., *Chinese Scholarship and Oklahoma City University School of Law*, 36 OKLA. CITY U. L. REV. 423 (2011).

9. Unless you’re young, or seeking to make a likely counter-factual political statement.

10. I’m ignoring Gay’s earlier work for the Oklahoma Court of Criminal Appeals, but then, I’m supposed to be writing about Larry.

It's much easier to talk about Larry doing justice than to do Larry justice. I suppose this, at least in part, is because no one has meant more to, or done more for our law school than he has. But it is also because of the richness of his virtues and the reach of his achievements.