



1982

The House Recalls the Cards

Royal G. Shannonhouse III

Follow this and additional works at: <http://scholarworks.law.ubalt.edu/lf>



Part of the [Law Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Shannonhouse, Royal G. III (1982) "The House Recalls the Cards," *University of Baltimore Law Forum*: Vol. 12: No. 2, Article 15.
Available at: <http://scholarworks.law.ubalt.edu/lf/vol12/iss2/15>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by ScholarWorks@University of Baltimore School of Law. It has been accepted for inclusion in University of Baltimore Law Forum by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks@University of Baltimore School of Law. For more information, please contact snolan@ubalt.edu.

The House Recalls the Cards

by Royal G. Shannonhouse

[A Retrospective of the University of Baltimore Law School by Royal G. Shannonhouse, Professor of Law, University of Baltimore; generally known to students as "the House." This is a transcript of an address to the University of Baltimore Law School Alumni during the annual meeting of the Maryland Bar Association in the Hyatt-Regency Hotel, Baltimore, Maryland, January 14, 1982.]

In the Fall of 1969, Joseph Curtis first opened the doors of the University of Baltimore Law School in the daytime and initiated a renaissance that continues with the vigor of talented youth today.

The trappings of our renaissance were modest to nonexistent. We were allocated a few classrooms in the undergraduate building and had another on the fourth floor of Langsdale Library and eventually a seminar room on the third floor of Langsdale. Our offices were on the north side of the fourth floor of the library, clustered around the emergency exit—a prudent location in those times.

We had a succession of secretaries at first. The Dean had three-fourths of one and Barry Berger and I shared the remaining fourth. (That is when my typing skill moved into the professional range.) One of them was a tall, pretty blond who was married to an American Indian, Miss Fleetfoot. She was well-named because she didn't stay long. Another is now a successful attorney and I am sure would rather her name not be mentioned, although, in my view, a law secretary is a dignified and indispensable professional. Then Irma Black came to us and became surrogate mother to hundreds of law students and a calming influence of uncommon good sense and decency and the best help that one could want. She remained Dean Curtis' good right hand until he retired in 1980.

Between Charles Hall and Langsdale there was our dining hall—a greasy spoon known as Little Ceasar's [sic] that sold more steak subs and

bicarbonate of soda than any beanery this side of Philadelphia.

Charles Hall was little less than half of what it is now. The rest of the block was occupied by Pat Hayes Buick Dealership and a cluster of dilapidated commercial buildings. As Dean Curtis and I passed Little Ceasar's on our way to my first visit to our offices in the library, Joe started to prepare me for the worst, having already explained that the classroom situation was due for improvement. I stopped him and at that moment we reached a consensus which immediately became a fundamental principle of our school. That is, the school is the students; the students are the school. You can have a fine building and prestigious faculty, but without students you have no school. A teacher and his students under a tree in a public park surrounded by expressways is a school. (And that's about what we started with.)

Thus we built a house of law out of a few books and a few teachers and a few students. A house of cards, in a sense.

The cards proved to be anything but flimsy, so the school endured and the second principle of our school became clear. The students who make a school do not cease to do so when they graduate. In at least three ways you continue to be the school. Your contributions as a student endure in material ways, like our logo and motto, "Peace and Justice Through Law," which was fashioned by Jim Schneider; like the Law Review, initiated by students; like the Student Bar Association, initiated by students and which won more than one first place in A.B.A. national competitions for law day activities and other public services. You also continue to be the school in that your performance while here contributed to our traditions, our customs and our reputation. You continue to be the school in that you

are our models, our inspirations, our counsellors, our guides. Our school is our symbiotic relationship in a community of lawyers striving for the same goal, peace and justice through law.

You may be proud that the voice and example of your school find expression through alumni whom I know in Florida and North Carolina, Maine, California and Alaska and I am sure many other places.

Back to the Cards. When asked to entitle this speech, I got trapped into making a hasty call and now must recall a few of the cards of which the school was built. There were aces and tens, kings and queens (some of the queens were tens) and at least one was the very deuce. The first full time faculty was Joseph Curtis, Barry Berger and myself. Barry was a blond bear of a young man. He would often consume an hour and a half of my time on a five-minute point of law, but he was an earnest teacher, dedicated to his students.

We necessarily relied heavily upon the part time faculty of the evening division and built upon their shoulders. All served with diligence and distinction. They laid the cornerstone around which we built. I mention but a few whose names may be familiar to you.

Judge Wilson K. Barnes, Associate Justice of the Court of Appeals taught contracts; Franklin Gerber taught real property; Hyman Ginsburg taught constitutional law; and Mahlon Hesse, corporations. Judge O'Donnell of the Supreme Bench taught criminal law and Judge Perrott, legal research and writing. Harry Sachs, General Equity Master of Baltimore City, taught equity.

Judge Solomon Liss, then of the Supreme Bench and now of the Court of Special Appeals of Maryland, taught personal property. It is said that once in class a student challenged Judge Liss on a point of law and the Judge replied: "I am the hen and you are my chicks. Chicks do not tell the hen how to lay an egg." The story may be apocryphal.

Among those first students whose names might be familiar to you were

Tom Hickman, State's Attorney for Carroll County, who has appeared in the press and on the television magazine, "60 Minutes," where he said more in thirty seconds about the role of the prosecuting attorney than is often explained in an hour of class.

There was Steve Scheinin, Assistant State's Attorney for Baltimore County when he is not jumping out of airplanes and reputed to be one of the best prosecuting attorneys in the state. Steve used to sit at mother Black's desk after she went home, pecking away at her typewriter and avowing that he was doing just great, as indeed he was and is.

Steve Berger learned, in a flash of insight, to break the shackles of the written word. In the discussion of a hypothetical problem I could not get Steve's head out of his book into independent thought. Finally I called his name until he looked up; then I held out my book and dropped it to the floor. Steve looked me in the eye for a heartbeat and then with one sweep of his arm cast his books, notebook, papers, pens and all from his desk in a small tornado. After that we had an interesting discussion. I understand that Steve still has an independent mind.

Alan Bernstein was born with an independent mind. He could argue the buttons off of Washington's coat in Mt. Vernon Square.

Ron Owens came along a little later but deserves mention for the following distinction. He had ventured an opinion which was correct in law, logic and precedent, but I attacked anyway to see if he could justify his position. Ron knew he was right and when finally trapped in a corner formed by his imprecise expression, he still defied me and said that he was nevertheless correct and when he got a little more experience, he could come back and explain it to me. He won the applause of the class, including my own. I am sure that he has no trouble explaining things now.

Melville Walwyn came to us from the Leeward Islands. Once he brought with him from the year-end holiday some of the best dark rum I have ever tasted (and in those days I was an

authority). He lived over on St. Paul Street, south of Mt. Royal. He was on his way to the St. Paul laundromat with a sack of clothes one dark night and a policeman stopped him and inquired into where he was going and what was in the sack. Mel considered it none of the policeman's business and said so. You can imagine the officer's reaction. After a time and further conversation with another officer and a sergeant—three police cars called to investigate Mel's dirty laundry!—Mel pulled out some lawyer's magic and was allowed to go on his way. I understand one of the policemen followed him all the way into the laundromat. Mel is now a government lawyer in Pennsylvania and doing quite well, I hear.

Jim Schneider, recently appointed a Federal Bankruptcy Judge, was in that first class. He designed our logo and motto and was instrumental in the formation of the Student Bar Association. He made it work virtually singlehandedly until it caught on and became the vigorous and self-perpetuating segment of our governing body that it is today. That was the S.B.A. that won the national awards over and over again and took a very active and effective role in bringing the law into the community in our high schools and on television and radio programs.

When the horrors of the Viet Nam war inflamed the student body until there was talk of marching into the streets en masse, the leadership and wisdom of Meb Turner preserved our equilibrium by allocating University time and space for the undergraduates to harangue each other—as they did for hour after hour. The leadership of Jim Schneider in the law school was the catalyst which caused us to coalesce around a statement formulated by the students. It was then reproduced and distributed in Hopkins Plaza by students and some members of the faculty. Those going into the federal building tended to ignore it and those coming out seemed to take it and read it. Withal, we endured and survived and taught ourselves anew that the persistent voices of reason and law eventually

prevail, if chaos can be avoided.

Jim was inexperienced in street law in those days and his peace symbol on the leaflet was a three-pointed star inside a circle—the logo of Daimler-Benz, an industrial pillar of the Nazi empire. But it was too late to change it and Jim said no one would notice it and most of them didn't.

You may wonder whether we still teach what we used to. The answer is, pretty much, yes. We teach more of it and, perhaps, teach it better; but in addition to the law courses, professional responsibility, ethics (which probably can't be taught) the usual law school things—we also try to teach some things that are perhaps unusual; maybe even unique. For example, we do not teach our students to survive, but to strive to excell. We teach them that if your goal is to survive and you fail, you're out; but if you strive to excell and fail, you're still pretty good. Like sex.

We teach them that the principal function of a teacher, like that of a parent, is to make himself or herself dispensable. As was said of the late Harold Ross, of *The New Yorker* magazine, we see our job as encouraging people more talented than we to do their work better than they had hitherto known how to do it, largely by being harder on themselves than they had been accustomed to be. That is the simple, secret method for achieving excellence. It remains a secret, Brendan Gill said, because it is so unappealing. The lesson does not always sink in right away. Once a recent graduate with a hot case pending called one of his former professors to appear as an expert witness in the case. "Expert witness as to what?" he was asked. He replied, "I want you as my expert witness on the law." Better than bringing your law books to court—bring a professor! Well, he's all right; he eventually achieved independence.

A teacher like a preacher can't talk without a lesson. The lesson of all this is what while we taught you to be independent of us, what you left behind is what we are and what you are is part of us. We love you all. God Bless you.

**FOUR SHOPS
ONE STOP!**

JAY'S DELI & SPIRITS

- Restaurant
- Carry-Out
- Pub
- Package Goods

FRIED CHICKEN

BURGERS

HOMEMADE DAILY: QUICHE SOUPS DESSERTS

BAR-BE-QUE CHICKENS

***SPECIALIZING IN**

***ICED COLD DRAFT BEER ON TAP**

IMPORTED BEERS — FULL LINE

IMPORTED WINES

PARTY TRAYS — FOR EVERY OCCASION



685-3861

Open 7 Days A Week

**Serving Breakfast
Lunch & Dinner!**

1309 & 1311 North Charles Street

UNIVERSITY OF BALTIMORE
SCHOOL OF LAW
1420 N. CHARLES STREET
BALTIMORE, MARYLAND 21201

Non-Profit Org.
U.S. Postage
PAID
Baltimore, Md.
Permit No. 4903