

Oklahoma City University School of Law

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A Personal Tribute To Richard E. Coulson

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A PERSONAL TRIBUTE TO RICHARD E. COULSON

Alvin C. Harrell*

In every life there is a handful of people whose example and counsel represent a major source of inspiration and guidance. For your author, Richard E. Coulson is one of those at the top of this list, and I am very pleased to have this opportunity to say thank you to this outstanding lawyer, teacher, scholar, colleague, and friend.

Many readers already know that it was Richard who first inspired my interest (as a student at Oklahoma City University School of Law) in the pursuit of legal scholarship. In teaching his classes, counseling students, and guiding the development of student research papers, Richard revealed the wonders of the law and legal writing. He inspired my interest in teaching and writing, enabled me to experience those thrills while still a student, and hired me first as an adjunct and then a member of the full-time faculty. Along with Professor (then Associate Dean) Von Creel, Richard secured my position as Law Clerk for the great jurist Alfred P. Murrah, then a Senior Judge for the Tenth Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals and Director of the Federal Judicial Center in Washington, D.C. First as a student and then as a colleague, to me Richard has always epitomized the finest qualities of an intellectual and a scholar, his classic response to a difficult question (“There are three views on that issue.”) illustrating his devotion to fairness and full inquiry.

Quite obviously, Richard E. Coulson has had a singular impact on my life and career, though these facts barely scratch the surface in terms of the impact of Richard’s counsel, assistance, and unswerving friendship. In view of all this, perhaps your author can be forgiven for believing that he has enjoyed a very special relationship with Richard, a relationship that has endured and grown stronger over a very long and varied period of time.

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Of course, there are many others who probably feel the same, including fellow Murrah Clerk Von Creel and fellow OCU Law grad Vicki MacDougall. But wait: in compiling such a list, one quickly realizes that there is no place to stop—virtually every living member of the OCU Law faculty (past and present) probably shares these same feelings about Richard E. Coulson. Just as with your author, Richard was instrumental in hiring virtually every member of the faculty, current or retired. Like your author, every other member of the OCU Law faculty has an enduring respect and admiration for Richard, and an appreciation for what he has accomplished as a scholar, mentor, colleague, and friend. It is quite clear that thousands of current and former students feel the same. To a unique degree, as a student, dean, and professor, Richard E. Coulson is responsible for the current academic stature, the last forty years of progress at the OCU School of Law, and the careers of its faculty and students.

Just as importantly, Richard was responsible for helping to maintain the exceptional brand of collegiality that characterized the OCU School of Law during Richard's thirty-six year faculty tenure. This collegiality helped to foster a uniquely open and respectful academic atmosphere, an achievement often acknowledged by former students and faculty. This should not be taken to suggest that intra-faculty relations were always smooth and agreeable over that period. And never could it be said that Richard was one to shrink from strong advocacy of his views, even when they were not popular. But Richard is a gentleman as well as a scholar. Richard's knowledge, personality and temperament, his high regard among his colleagues, his sense of honor and well-known standards of fairness, and his willingness to serve as a responsible, guiding force in faculty governance matters, helped assure that the OCU School of Law achieved a degree of faculty cohesion that must be nearly unique in academia. This has contributed significantly to the achievements and progress of the law school over the past four decades.

So, while it is tempting for your author to view Richard's inspiration and friendship as part of an exceptional, or even unique, personal relationship, and his retirement from the full-time faculty as a great personal loss, in fact this is a sentiment and loss likely shared by all of the faculty (and thousands of former and current students). It does not mean the end of my friendship with Richard E. Coulson, or the respect and admiration that I have for him, which continue to serve as sources of inspiration to this day. But it does mean the end of his stewardship as a

member of the full-time faculty of this great and important institution. And that is a loss that we all likely share.

