Fond Memories of Bob Lyman

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Almost a quarter of a century ago, I was sitting at my desk at the University of Wyoming on a late October day, the sleet beating against my window, when the phone rang. On the other end of the line was Bob Lyman. His message was short and to the point. He said, "You need to interview at OCU. From one Wyoming guy to another, I can tell you that you will love the state of Oklahoma, its people, and especially OCU." He also pointedly mentioned that it was seventy-five degrees in Oklahoma City and he was thinking of taking his bass boat out on the lake. In response to Bob’s call, I interviewed at OCU and have been here ever since. I now know that Bob was right about OCU and the great folks in Oklahoma, but I note that he left out the part about ice storms and tornados from his original sales pitch. I have long since forgiven him for that omission.

Bob’s call to me was typical of the things Bob was doing for OCU at that time. Then, the School of Law had good students and an excellent faculty, but the university was poor, money was tight, and the old “Barracks” law building was literally falling down around its occupants. It was during this period that Bob, through example and action, did so much to insure not only the survival of the Law School, but laid the foundation for it to prosper.

Vicki MacDougall tells the story of the day the “Barracks” flooded. Bob was then the Acting Dean and Vicki was a senior at OCU and editor of the Law Review. One evening, the ceiling water pipes ruptured at the worst possible place, right over the library section. Dean Lyman rolled up his sleeves, and using his marine experience, marshaled a group of students and faculty and worked through the night, removing every book by hand, to save our indispensable law books. The operation was a success.

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I suspect that very few law deans could claim they rolled up their sleeves and personally saved their library collection from destruction. Bob Lyman did it.

In later years, many of us, folks like Vicki MacDougall, Nancy Kenderdine, Marge Downing, Bill Beintema, and myself, to name a few, have fond memories of Bob’s spinning great (and sometimes even true) yarns about Wyoming over lunch in the faculty dining room.

However, Bob’s greatest lasting legacy will always be the thousands of students whose lives he touched through his teaching and personal example. Above all, Bob cared about his students, wanted the best for them, and did all in his power to give them not only the building blocks for legal excellence, but also for success in life. That care and affection is reciprocated by all, students and colleagues, who had the privilege of knowing and working with Bob.