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Morris L. Shafer . . .The Dean

Louis F. Del Duca*

Our quiet Sunday spring afternoon in May, 1956, was interrupted by a call from Morris Shafer, Dean Designate of the Dickinson School of Law. On inquiry to the Harvard Law School Placement Office, he had been informed that as a student I had indicated a possible interest in law teaching. The persuasive presentation of Morris Shafer was followed by consultations with family, friends and professional colleagues. The choice between service in legal education or in big city law practice was resolved for me.

Morris Shafer's vigorous recruitment efforts five months before the formal assumption of his duties as Dean at the Dickinson School of Law were typical of his vigor and dedication to legal education and the Dickinson Law School throughout his tenure as Dean, except for the period immediately prior to his retirement when physical infirmity took its toll.

Morris Shafer was a man of courage. He confronted difficult decisions. He did not avoid them.

At the outset of his administration he inherited difficult personnel decisions. The solutions have been much debated. However, he chose not to shrink from decisions he deemed necessary and proper. It was the measure of the man in his years of full vigor and good health that at the very outset of his administration he enthusiastically supported the appointment of a Faculty Committee to draft a formal set of tenure rules. Over the years, these rules have provided guidelines needed for recruitment, advancement and retention of qualified personnel and have minimized areas of controversy.

Morris Shafer brought to his new assignment as Dean sound academic and practical legal experience as well as years of administrative and classroom experience as a college educator. He recognized the constant necessity to adjust curriculae to changing times and societal needs. One of his early efforts was directed towards expansion of the curriculum of the Law School from a three year program of required courses to a combined system of required and elective courses. Under the new system second and third year students were given a choice of some twenty electives structured for small seminar or class groups catering to individual student needs and extensive writing experience.

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The need for an active, interested and participating alumni was immediately recognized by Dean Shafer. It is to his great credit that the first Dickinson Law School Alumni Association was formed shortly after he assumed his duties. The brick and mortar prerequisites of quality legal education also did not escape him. During his tenure the physical plant was enriched by the extensive renovation of Trickett Hall and the addition of the Feldman Lounge and the new Library. His fortitude and recognition of the financial needs of the Law School led him courageously to induce the Board of Trustees to seek for the Law School its just student per capita share of State aid being distributed to other graduate schools in the Commonwealth. His efforts to upgrade the level of student financial assistance and Faculty salaries were significant.

There was in the man during his years of vigor and good health a striving for excellence and an unwillingness to settle for mediocre levels of performance for himself or his students and colleagues. Beneath the quiet exterior of a man inclined to keep his counsel was a warm-honest-dedicated personality.

Those of us who shared the journey of ten years with him at the Dickinson School of Law respectfully close the ledger and look on his career with assurances to his widow, family and friends of our gratitude for creative work and services well performed.